# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

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# THESIS

**INSTABILITY IN THE HORN OF AFRICA: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ETHIOPIA-ERITREAN CONFLICT**

by

Edwin M. Teka

September 2010

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This thesis analyzes instability in the Horn of Africa focusing specifically to the Ethiopia-Eritrea border conflict fought between the two countries in 1998-2000. It provides a historical background of both countries, and how they were influenced by external actors and subsequent federation of Eritrea into Ethiopia in 1950. The study then examines the termination of Eritrean federation, which sparked the emergence of secession movements culminating to Eritrea's independence in 1993.

Among the notable findings of the study are that the two countries signed a total of twenty-five protocols by September 1993, which included among other things, a joint defense pact and trade agreements but were not implemented. Economic and border incompatibilities served as sources of tension between the two countries. Despite the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the African Union and the international community have failed to resolve this conflict, and it remains a potential flashpoint in the Horn of Africa.

The recommendations include pursuing a political compromise over the symbolic village of Badme and placing it under the sovereignty of a condominium administered by both states and then addressing other sources of interdependence. Additionally, the international community needs to pressurize both countries to fully democratize.

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**INSTABILITY IN THE HORN OF AFRICA: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ETHIOPIA-ERITREAN CONFLICT**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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# ABSTRACT

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A.D        Anno Domini

AC        Ambassador Committee

ANDM        Amhara National Democratic Movement

AU        African Union

BBC        British Broadcasting Corporation

BMA        British Military Administration

CPA        Comprehensive Peace Agreement

DML        Democratic Marxist League

EAC        East African Community

EEBC        Eritrea Ethiopia Boundary Commission

ELF        Eritrean Liberation Front

ELM        Eritrean Liberation Movement

EPFDF        Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front

EPLF        Eritrean People's Liberation Front

EPPF        Ethiopia People's Patriotic Front

EU        European Union

FPCI        Four Power Commission of Investigation

FPPP        Four Point Peace Proposal

HLD        High-Level Delegation

HOA        Horn of Africa

IDP        Internally Displaced Persons

ISI        Import Substitution Industrialization

L/C        Letters of Credit

| | |
|---|---|
| MCC | Military Coordination Committee |
| ML | Muslim League |
| OAU | Organization of African Union |
| OLF | Oromo Liberation Front |
| ONLF | Ogaden National Liberation Front |
| OPDO | Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization |
| POW | Prisoner of War |
| TFG | Transitional Federal Government |
| TPLF | Tigrayan People's Liberation Front |
| TSZ | Temporary Security Zone |
| U.S | United States |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNMEE | United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea |
| UNSC | United Nation Security Council |
| UNSCR | United Nation Security Council Resolution |
| USA | United States of America |
| UXO | Unexploded Ordinance |

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# I.    INTRODUCTION

## A.    BACKGROUND

With the possible exception of Australia, historically, all continents have witnessed border disputes, some of which have turned violent. Of no continent is this truer than Africa. At present, Benin has disputes with Togo, Burkina Faso and Nigeria; Sudan has frontier differences with Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Chad and the Central African Republic; Libya, Niger and Chad disagree on where their respective borders should lie; Equatorial Guinea has frontier quarrels with Gabon, Nigeria and Cameroon; and Tanzania and Malawi squabble over the border of Lake Nyassa. Some of these territorial disputes are fuelled by a quest to control resources such as oil, minerals, fish, timber, or other shared resources like water. For example the Bakassi Peninsula between Nigeria and Cameroon has abundant fish and possibly, oil deposits, the Aozou region between Chad and Libya is rich in uranium deposits, and the Corisco Bay between Equatorial Guinea and Gabon has oil prospects. However, none of Africa's border disputes have erupted into wars of the magnitude of that fought between Ethiopia and Eritrea from May 1998 to June 2000.[1]

The frontier dispute between the two countries was the product of the annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia in 1962 which ended the federation which had been sanctioned by the United Nations (UN) since 1950. In 1991, Eritrea launched an independence bid in the wake of a revolution that overthrew the brutal Mengistu Haile Mariam's regime [also referred to as the Derg or Dergue][2] in Addis Ababa. Eritrea's independence in 1993 left

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[1] Kidane Mengisteab and Okbzaghi Yohannes, *Anatomy of an African Tragedy: Political, Economic and Foreign Policy Crisis in Post-Independent Eritrea* (The Red Sea Press, 2005), 238–239.

[2] The term Derg or Dergue is Amharic for "council" or "committee." It became the popular name for the post-imperial Marxist Ethiopian regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam (1974–1991). The overthrow of the Mengistu regime in 1991 in Addis Ababa was achieved through the joint effort of two rebel forces, Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), in exchange of which they agreed Eritrea would secede. The core component of the EPRDF was Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), operating in the province of Tigray that adjoins Eritrea. It took the ELF and TPLF guerilla movements 30 years of fighting in order to defeat the Ethiopian Military dictatorship. After secession, EPRF under the leadership of Meles Zenawi and EPLF under the leadership of Isaayas Afeworki formed transitional governments in Ethiopia and Eritrea, respectively.

Ethiopia landlocked (Figure 1). Although many Ethiopians were opposed to the secession of Eritrea, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPFDF) transitional government under Meles Zenawi contended that it was an essential move to resolving the conflict that had "bedeviled" the country for the previous thirty years.[3] Nonetheless, after Eritrea's independence in 1993, the two states continued to have warm and cordial relations affording free trade and movement across the common borders for their mutual benefit.[4] President Issayas Afeworki and Prime Minister Meles Zenawi had been "comrades in combat" for more than a decade, had defeated a common enemy [the Derg], and projected an image of unanimity that proved to be something of a public myth.[5]

In May 1998, longstanding political and economic tensions erupted in a war between Ethiopia and Eritrea that lasted for two years. The main trigger for this war was a border dispute in the village of Badme.[6]  The international community sent a United Nations Peacekeeping Mission to Eritrea and Ethiopia (UNMEE) in December 2000, at the request of the two parties, to oversee the ceasefire and demilitarization of the border area, as well as appoint an independent Ethiopia-Eritrea Border Commission (EEBC) charged with demarcating the 621-mile boundary. Both countries promised to accept the EEBCs demarcation as final and binding.[7] Initially, the peace process progressed well without any recurrence of conflicts, and when the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) [Figure 2] was demarcated on the Eritrean side of the *de facto* border in early 2001, the

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[3] The first Eritrea secession movement—Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) emerged in 1961. Also see Sally Healy, "Lost Opportunities in the Horn of Africa: How Conflicts Connect and Peace Agreements Unravel," *Chatham House* (2008), 12, at:
http://www.riftvalley.net/resources/file/healyhornafrica_2008.pdf  (accessed January 20, 2010).

[4] Elise Barth, "The United Nations Mission in Eritrea/Ethiopia: Gender(ed) Effects," *Oslo: International Peace Research Institute* (2004), 10, at:
http://www.prio.no/sptrans/1239824168/Gender_Aspects_of_Conflict_Interventions_(full-text).pdf (accessed February 14, 2010).

[5] Richard Reid, "Old Problems in New Conflicts: Some Observations on Eritrea and its Relations with Tigray, from Liberations struggle to Interstate Wars," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* Vol. 73, No. 3 (2003), 369–401.

[6] Healy, "Lost Opportunities in the Horn of Africa: How Conflicts Connect and Peace Agreements Unravel," 19.

[7] Jon H.S. Lie, "UNMEE:Deterioration and Termination," Institute of International Affairs, (2009), 10, at: http://www.peacebuilding.no/eng/Publications/Noref-Reports2/Noref-Report-19-UNMEE-deterioration-and-termination.  (accessed February 24, 2010).

Ethiopians withdrew their troops by March 2001. However, the outcome of the EEBC was rejected by Ethiopia when the village that started the war, Badme, was placed on the Eritrean side of the border prompting heightened tensions. As a result of years of failure of the United Nations to enforce the mediated agreement, Eritrea reciprocated by banning helicopter flights and limiting fuel supplies and rations to UN forces, which prompted the organization to prematurely end the mission in July 2008.

Conflict resolution is a delicate process that requires an in-depth understanding of the deep-rooted sources of a crisis and the problems associated with management.[8] This study of the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict endeavors to answer the following questions:

1.    What are the fundamental causes that led to the crisis?
2.    Why has it remained unresolved?
3.    Which stakeholders need to be involved to secure the peace and reconciliation process?

Invariably, understanding regional and international dynamics in relation to this crisis is essential. The task of reconciling the people of these two states is a daunting one that will require a coordinated approach by all stakeholders to prevent spoilers from impeding the process. This thesis is based on the premise that a thorough understanding of the historical dynamics of the conflict offers an important first step in designing policies that will help  to restore stability in the Horn of Africa (HOA). Of course, all crises are the product of unique circumstances, with their own history, leadership personalities, and sets of issues to be resolved. However, they also encompass common characteristics, above all, the requirement for foreign intervention.[9] It is hoped that a dispassionate analysis of the Ethiopia-Eritrea border conflict will expose potential pitfalls in conflict resolution and might serve as a guide to resolve future disputes of this nature.

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[8] Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse,  and Hugh Miall, *Contemporay Conflict Resolution* (Malden: Polity Press, 2005), 18.

[9]  Most post-1945 conflicts do not spontaneously resolve themselves. They often require a third party to move the peacemaking forward. Also see Chester A. Croker, *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict* (Unites States Institute of Peace Press, 2001), 230–231.

**Figure 1.    Horn of Africa**[10]

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[10] From: United Nations, http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/horne-r.pdf (Accessed May 25, 2010).

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## B.   IMPORTANCE

The border stalemate in conjunction with the underlying problems of authoritarian political processes and fragile governments in Ethiopia and Eritrea are linked to larger conflicts in the Horn of Africa.[11]  The two states compete in supporting rival parties and armed groups in neighboring states. They both have used proxy wars carried out by armed insurgent groups such the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), and the Ethiopian People's Patriotic Front (EPPF) to undermine each other.[12] Ethiopia supports Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed and the dysfunctional Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Somalia. Eritrea has extended support to rebels from eastern Sudan and Darfur, as well as arming anti-Ethiopian forces in Somalia with the hope of tying down Ethiopian forces in their own Ogaden region away from the Eritrean border. Eritrea has also provided sanctuary and military assistance to these groups and has sought to infiltrate fighters into Ethiopia via Sudan and Somalia. The two countries' deeply ingrained rivalries create the conditions for perpetual conflict.

On a humanitarian scale, the 1998–2000 war between Ethiopia and Eritrea claimed some 100,000 lives and produced more than a million internally displaced persons (IDP),[13] as well as  squandering a generation of development opportunities.[14] The war was also attended by deportations of the citizens of the opposing states. Ethiopia expelled approximately 75,000 Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin, while Eritrea deported 60,000 Ethiopians and Eritreans of Ethiopian origin.[15]  These IDPs languish in

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[11] Terrence Lyons, "Avoiding Conflict in Horn of Africa: U.S Policy toward Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Council on Foreign Relations*,  21 (December 2006), 9.

[12] International Crisis Group, "Beyond the Fragile Peace Between Ethiopia and Eritrea: Averting new war," *Africa Report,* 141 (17 June 2008), 13, at:  http://www.cmi.no/sudan/doc/?id=1014 (accessed February 14, 2010).

[13] Jonathan Ewing, "Ethiopia and Eritrea in Turmoil: Implications for Peace and Security in a Troubled Region," Institute For Security Studies Report (December 2008), 2, at: http://centirene.co.za/dynamic/administration/file_manager/file_links/SITREPETHERIT301108.PDF?link_id=22&slink_id=7067&link_type=12&slink_type=13&tmpl_id=3 (accessed February 28, 2010).

[14] Lyons, "Avoiding Conflict in Horn of Africa: U.S Policy toward Ethiopia and Eritrea," 7.

[15] Martin Plaut, *The conflict and its aftermath in Unfinished Business: Ethiopia and Eritrea at War* (Asmara: Red Sea Press 2004), 119.

camps permanently, relying on relief food. The Eritrean government declared a state of emergency in 2000 thereby halting any form of development, including the implementation of a new constitution. Both governments have used the pretext of counterterrorism and states of emergency to silence the opposition and to repress the populace. This unstable situation is breeding radicals in the two countries. It is imperative for new solutions to be offered to defuse tensions at the earliest opportunity and resolve this prolonged stalemate before a new conflict breaks out.

## C.    PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESIS

While Eritrea has had border conflicts with Yemen, Djibouti, and Sudan,[16] the magnitude of its tensions with these neighbors pales in comparison with its relations with Ethiopia. The current situation notwithstanding, the people of Ethiopia and Eritrea had lived in harmony, intermarried, and shared common ambitions for centuries. The people of Tigray and the highland Eritreans share the same culture and language, Tigrinya. Indeed, even the Prime Minister Meles Zenawi is of Eritrean origin on his mother's side. Moreover, Eritrea was a part of the Ethiopian empire until 1991 when the country gained independence.[17]

The first argument presented in thesis is that the Ethiopian and Eritrean border conflict is politically manipulated, and not the result of inherent ethnic, tribal, or racial differences. Traditional conflict resolution and mediation mechanisms have been systematically and deliberately eroded by the policies of both regimes. The two states have institutionalized a set of disagreements and contradictions that have plagued relations between them since Eritrea's liberation struggle.[18]

Secondly, it can be argued that the international community has proved powerless to overcome resistance of the local actors who have sabotaged the implementation framework designed in the Algiers Agreement to achieve actual border demarcation. For

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[16] Lyon, "Avoiding Conflict in Horn of Africa: U.S Policy toward Ethiopia and Eritrea," 6.

[17] Paul Collier, *Wars, Guns And Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 177.

[18] Reid, "Old Problems in New Conflicts: Some Observations on Eritrea and its Relations with Tigray, from Liberations struggle to Interstate Wars," 371.

its part, the United Nations has failed to pressure Ethiopia to accept the boundary with Eritrea as defined by the international law. Another major international actor, the United States, preoccupied by its "War on Terror," has taken a "back seat" in the dispute.[19] For these reasons, the prospects for conflict resolution do not look good.

## D.    LITERATURE REVIEW

Since authors' opinions on the root cause of Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict are deeply divided, this thesis will summarize a variety of theories and classify the causes into three main categories - those by authors' who argue that the conflict is rooted in economic conditions, those authors' who view it as a result of a combination of economic and political issues, and those authors' who attribute the conflict to political manipulation by both internal and external actors. The first group, the economic school, argues that Eritrean secession was unacceptable (by Ethiopians) especially from the Amhara and Oromo tribes) because it denied Ethiopia the right of access to the sea, thereby seriously impacting Ethiopia's ability to export its products. According to Sally Healy, an associate fellow of the Africa Programme at Chatham House, the port of Assab, built to serve Ethiopia, fell under control of Eritrea whose trading needs were already fully met through the port of Massawa.[20] As the result of the 1991 agreement, Ethiopia was left with no option but to cooperate with Djibouti and Somalia for sea access.  Anup Shar concurs that the major reason for conflict is Ethiopia's lack of access to the sea. Ethiopia's propaganda to its people is that they need a different regime in Eritrea more compatible to Ethiopia's economic interests.[21] For British journalist Michela Wrong, "Eritrea regarded the new war as proof that Ethiopia had never digested the loss of its coast and

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[19] John  Prendergast and Collin J. Thomas, "Blowing the Horn," *Council of Foreign Relations* (March/April 2007),  2, at:  http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/20070301faessay86205/john-prendergast-and-colin-thomas-jensen/blowing-the-horn (accessed February 11, 2010).

[20] Healy, "Lost Opportunities in the Horn of Africa: How Conflicts Connect and Peace Agreements Unravel," 19.

[21] Anup Shar, "Conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia," at: http://www.globalissues.org/article/89/conflict-between-ethiopia-and-eritrea (accessed March 6, 2010).

was bent on reconquest,"[22] while Leenco Lata, a freelance writer on the politics of the Horn of Africa, attributes the conflict to trade competition between the ruling parties EPLF and TPLF to uplift their respective economies using resources and markets in Ethiopia.[23]

The second school, [eclectic], combines both economic and political issues as causes of the conflict. Ruth Iyob, an associate professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara, asserts that many powerful forces drove the discord: the old rivalry between the two liberation fronts - the Eritrean EPLF and the Tigrayan TPLF - both of which helped to free Ethiopia from Mengistu's tyranny; economic competition over foreign trade; the Eritrean decision to use the newly-coined nakfa currency for the independent state, and the different political visions of the respective leadership cadres, one favoring a "hegemonic" (Ethiopian) state while the other opting for a "diasporic" (Eritrean) state form.[24] In August 2007, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Meles Zenawi said that Badme was not the pretext for Eritrean invasion in 1998, but the real reasons were political and economic. For Gabru Asrat, a former member of the politburo of the TPLF, the conflict was fanned by dual and contradicting ambitions of Eritrean leadership. Soon after independence, Eritrean leaders aspired to create at the earliest opportunity both a distinct Eritrean national identity and a robust economy comparable to that of Singapore.[25] A Political Science lecturer at the University of South Africa in Pretoria, John Nyuot Yoh, also affirms that the reasons for the war were two fold—sea access for Ethiopia and ethnic politics in the two countries.[26]

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[22] Michela Wrong, *I Didn't Do It For You: How The World Betrayed a Small African Nation* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 19.

[23] Leenco Lata, "The Search for Peace: The Conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Proceedings of Schorlarly Conference on Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict Held in Oslo, Norway* (6–7 July 2006), 10, at http://www.fafo.no/pub/rapp/20014/20014.pdf (accessed March 6, 2010).

[24] The term "diasporic states" is heuristic, meant to denote states whose identity is forged in struggles for political, economic and social survival, and the need to return to homeland. Also see Ruth Iyob, "The Ethiopian-Eritrean Conflict: Diasporic vs Hegemonic States in the Horn of Africa," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 38, No. 4 (December 2000), 660–677.

[25] Lata, "The Search for Peace: The Conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea," 10.

[26] John G. Nyuot Yoh, "Peace Processes and Conflict Resolution in the Horn of Africa," *African Security Review* 12, 3 (2003), 86.

The third school argues that political manipulation by internal actors to serve domestic purposes is at the root of the conflict. According to Jonathan Ewing, an independent political analyst from the Institute of Security Studies, this conflict is a private battle between President Afeworki and Prime Minister Zenawi.[27] Both states have degenerated into autocracies and both have lost their legitimacy based on trust and instead rely on coercion and total control.[28] This explains their inability to re-establish a working relationship for the economic benefit of both countries.[29] The two leaders also share a political culture in which compromise is equated with capitulation and which further exacerbates their personal animosity. Personal hatred and mutual suspicion between the two leaders is replicated by the intractable nature of the conflict. What scholars fail to address is the linkage of how all these factors contributed to the conflict.

External actors like Egypt, in their pursuit to maintain dominance over the Nile River, have exacerbated the conflict. According to Daniel Kendie, a Professor of History at Henderson State University: "...as far as the Blue Nile goes it has been held that Egypt must be in a position either to dominate Ethiopia, or to neutralize whatever unfriendly regime might emerge there."[30] As the late Egyptian President Sadat once stated: "Any action that would endanger the waters of the Blue Nile will be faced with a firm reaction on the part of Egypt, even if that action should lead to war."[31]

As a sequel to this statement, an observer of the Egyptian scene recently wrote:

Egypt is a country that has not abandoned its expansionist ambitions. It regards its southern neighbors as its sphere of influence. Its strategy is essentially negative: to prevent the emergence of any force that could challenge its hegemony, and to thwart any economic development along

[27] Ewing, "Ethiopia and Eritrea in Turmoil: Implications for Peace and Security in a Troubled Region," 4.

[28] Tanja R. Muller, "State making in the Horn of Africa: notes on Eritrea and the prospects for the end of violent conflict in the Horn," *Conflict, Security and Development*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (December 2006), 503–530.

[29] Healy, "Lost Opportunities in the Horn of Africa: How Conflicts Connect and Peace Agreements Unravel," 18.

Daniel Kendie, *The Five Dimensions of the Eritrean Conflict, 1941-2004: Deciphering the Geo-political Puzzle* (Signature Book Printing, Inc. 2005), 189.

[31] Patricia Wright, *Conflict on the Nile: The Fashoda Incident of 1898* (London: Heinemann, 1972), 44.

the banks of the Nile that could either divert the flow of the water, or decrease its volume. The arithmetic of the waters of the Blue Nile River is, therefore, a zero-sum game, which Egypt is determined to win. It must have a hegemonic relationship with the countries of the Nile Valley and the Horn of Africa. When, for instance, Ethiopia is weak and internally divided, Egypt can rest. But when Ethiopia is prosperous and self-confident, playing a leading role in the region, Egypt is worried.[32]

While political manipulation by both internal and external actors to serve particular interests cannot be overruled, any attempts at resolution that are not collaborative and backed by political will may not be fruitful. The UNMEE that lacked a political mandate became "a puppet and hostage of the conflict."[33]
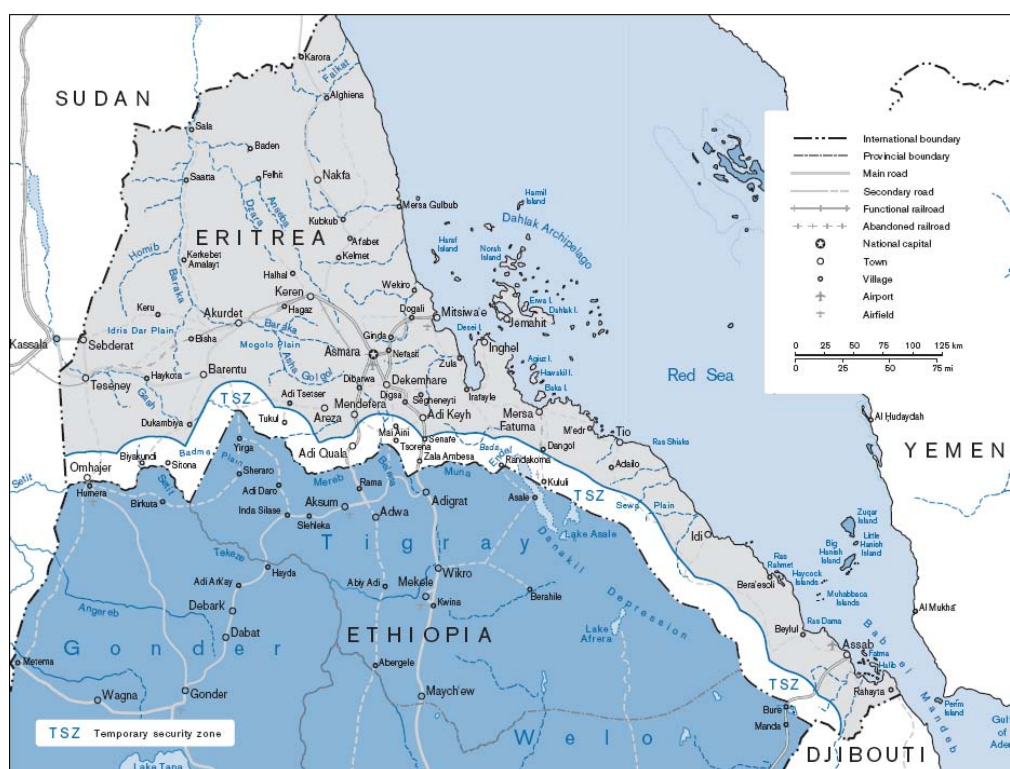


**Figure 2.     Temporary Security Zone between Ethiopia and Eritrea**[34]

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[32] Addis Tribune, "Egypt and the Hornof Africa," June 26, 1998.

[33] Lie, "UNMEE:Deterioration and Termination," 20.

[34] From: http://www.riftvalley.net/resources/file/healyhornafrica_2008.pdf (accessed January 10, 2010).

## E.   METHODS AND SOURCES

This study will use a combination of qualitative analysis and process tracing to analyze the changes that have occurred in both Ethiopia and Eritrea and which have greatly impacted the conflict environment. Particular attention will be paid to the policies and strategies these countries' regimes have pursued that led to and continue to sustain the current border stalemate and which discourage meaningful solutions. The research will rely mainly on secondary sources of data, such as books, journals, scholarly articles, internet sources, and other written material. This study will also draw on the author's own experiences while serving as the operations officer with the first Kenya Demining Company (KENDEM I) in the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE III) from October 2003 to September 2004.

## F.   ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The thesis will be structured into several sections, beginning with the current chapter that introduces the conflict. Chapter II will briefly cover a historical review of the area under study and establish the basis of tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea that eventually fuelled the current conflict. In order to understand the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict, the turbulent history of the two countries must be explored and their unique geographical position between Sudan and Somalia must be understood. It must also be realized that neither country has witnessed any semblance of peace for decades. This will be followed by Chapter III, which will analyze the factors that led to the conflict. Chapter IV will analyze and critique the attempts by different stakeholders in resolving this conflict as well as exploring prospects for reconciliation and peace building between the two states. Chapter V will highlight what needs to be taken into consideration in order for trust to take root in this region. Recognizing that reconciliation alone will not bring peace, measures for economic development, poverty alleviation, and provision of alternative means of livelihood need to be considered. Finally, Chapter VI will provide conclusions, recommendations and lessons learnt as the international community labors to resolve this conflict.

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# II.  HISTORICAL REVIEW OF AREA UNDER STUDY

## A.  INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia and Eritrea are distinct nation-states with four common ethnic tribes—Afar, Saho, Tigrinya, and Kunama—with populations that straddle their common borders (Figure 3).[35] Eritrea joined a federal union with Ethiopia in 1950 following a UN resolution. The dissolution of this federation marked the beginning of Eritrea's struggle for independence which was finally achieved through the cooperation of secessionist movements, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF),[36] and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Historically, the region had been influenced by outside players.

## B.  ITALIAN OCCUPATION

Ethiopia is among the world's most ancient civilizations ranked along with China, Egypt and Persia. The country is famed for its Axumite Empire that was organized by the first century AD as a respected trading center.[37] According to the Persian prophet, Mani (216–276 A.D), "There are four great kingdoms on earth: The first is the Kingdom of Babylon [Mesopotamia] and Persia. The second is the Kingdom of Rome; the third is the Kingdom of the Axumites, and the fourth is the Kingdom of the Chinese."[38] At its zenith, Axum was the most powerful state between the Roman Empire and Persia. It controlled large parts today's highland Eritrea and the Arabian coastline across the Red Sea.[39] Save for the five years of Italian occupation from 1936 to 1941, Ethiopia maintained its independence. However, the major European powers—Britain, France and Italy—never

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[35] Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War: Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 16.

[36] EPLF helped TPLF to defeat the "brutal" regime in Addis, in exchange of which they agreed Eritrea would secede.

[37] Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855–1991* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2001), 8.

[38] Kobishchanov  M. Juri, *Axum* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), 51–59.

[39] Zewde, A History of Modern Ethiopia, 8.

reconciled themselves with Ethiopia's independence because the Tripartite Treaty signed on December 13, 1906 partitioning Ethiopia into their spheres of influence has not been abrogated.[40]

Ethiopia's political landscape is dominated by three main ethnic groups – the Oromo, the Amhara and the Tigray. The Oromo are the largest ethnic group occupying the central and southern parts of the country. However, much of their land has been taken by the northern ethnic groups, the Amhara and Afar, and as a group, they remain marginalized.[41] The Amhara are the second largest group occupying the central and northwestern part of the country. The pre-1991 ruling elites of modern Ethiopia came from this ethnic group. As Christopher Clapham asserted in 1960, about three quarters of senior government officials in Ethiopia were from this region.[42] The Tigray ethnic group is the smallest of the three major ethnic groups and constitutes less than ten percent of the country's total population. Although the Tigray were at the centre of the Axumite Empire, with the exception of a brief reign of Emperor Yohannes IV's rule (1872-1889), the region remained marginalized during the era of the modern Ethiopian state. However, following the collapse of the Derg in 1991, the TPLF has dominated Ethiopian politics to date. The TPLF has forged a coalition with the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO) and the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) creating a "semblance" of a multi-ethnic national party, the Eritrean People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). The TPLF expanded its national outreach by sponsoring satellite ethnic-based parties including those from within the governing coalition. This is TPLF's strategy of controlling power rather than advancing ethnic equality and genuine decentralization.[43]

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[40] E. Hertslet, *The Map of Africa by Treaty. Vol. II* (New York: Frank Cass & Co, 1967), 422–423.

[41] Kidane Mengisteab and Okbazghi Yohannes, *Anatomy of an African Tragedy: Political, Economic and Foreign Policy Crisis in Post-Independent Eritrea*, 246.

[42] Ibid.

[43] John W. Harbeson, *Elections and Democratization in Post-Mengistu Ethiopia* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 111–131.

Eritrea, on the other hand, became a political entity in 1890.[44] Eritrea is composed of seven main ethnic groups, Tigre, Beni Amer, Bilen, Saho, Baria, Kunama, and Afar (Figure 3).[45] The central highlands of Eritrea were part and parcel of the Axumite civilization of Ethiopia. The main inhabitants of these highlands were the Tigrinya[46] speakers who trace their culture, religion and language to the kingdom of Axum.[47] The western part of Eritrea is inhabited by the Kunama tribe which also straddles the Ethiopian border. The eastern and the coastal parts are inhabited by the Afars who have lived independently and, at times, resisted attempts at subjugation by Christian Ethiopian highlanders.[48] In 1890, Italy combined all these separate tribal groups to establish the state of Eritrea as their first colony in Africa, and named it after the Latin name for the Red Sea - Erythraeum Mare.

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[44] Daniel Kendie, *The Five Dimensions of the Eritrean Conflict, 1941–2004: Deciphering the Geo-political Puzzle* (Signature Book Printing, Inc. 2005). 2.

[45] They speak different languages, possess different religions and are conscious of their separate identities.

[46] The people from Tigray region are called by the Amharic speakers in Ethiopia Tigre, and Tigrayans for plural. Their language is called Tigrinya. Those Tigrinya speakers who come from the Eritrea side will simply be referred to as Eritreans in this thesis.

[47] Siegfried Pausewang and Astir Shurke (Ed). *The Referendum on Independence for Eritrea* (Report of the Norwegian observer Group in UNOVER. Human Rights Report No. 2. Oslo, (1993), 5.

[48] Tekeste Negash, *Eritrea and Ethiopia: The Federal Experience* (Newbrunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 17.

Source: Tekeste Negash, *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea*, 1987, p. 5.

**Legend:**

**— ⸱ — ⸱ International Boundary**

**— ⸱ — Ethnic Boundary**
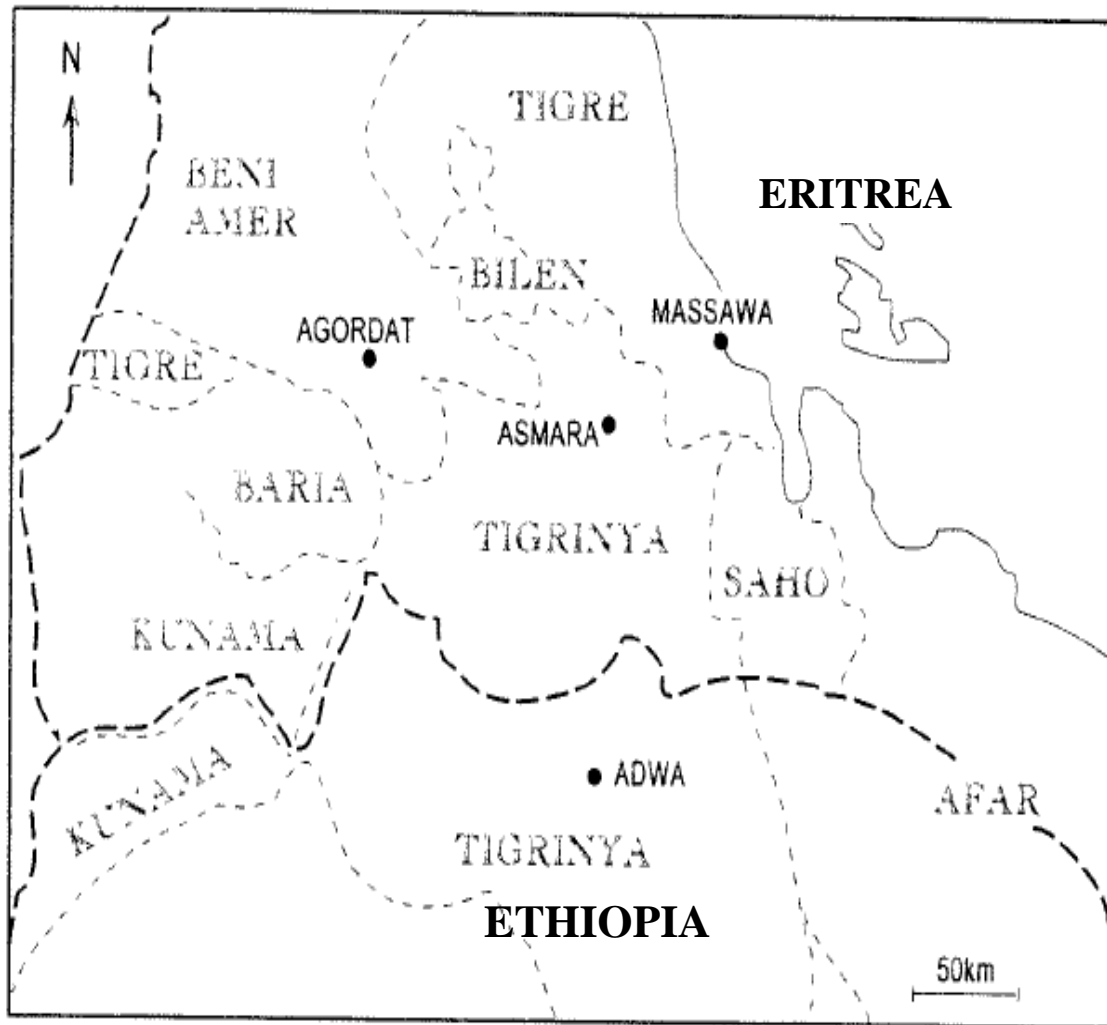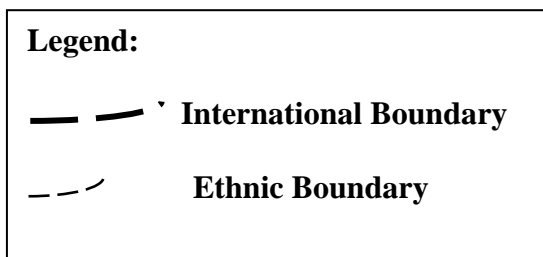
**Figure 3.    Ethnic Map of Eritrea**[49]

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[49] Source: Tekeste Nagash, Italian Colonialism in Eritrea (1987), 5.

Eritrea, in the Italian colonial framework, served many purposes. The seaports of Assab and Massawa were used as conduits for export and import trade with northern Ethiopia. While in Eritrea, the Italians extended their influence into Ethiopia and used Eritrea's strategic location as a command post to launch its invasion of Ethiopia in 1935; it subsequently became Rome's main economic and communications center south of Suez.  The temperate highlands of Eritrea were used to settle landless Italian peasants from southern Italy. Eritrea also served as a source of soldiers for further Italian colonial adventures in Libya and Ethiopia. The "pacification" of Somalia, by Italy was executed by Eritrean soldiers.[50] In order to facilitate military mobility for the conquest of Ethiopia, Italians invested heavily in Eritrea's communications infrastructure.[51] They built a vast network of all-weather roads totaling 1,176 kilometers;[52] the 354 kilometer- long Massawa-Asmara-Agorat railway,[53] and also expanded the ports.[54] Military installations, depots, workshops, warehouses, shops, villas and flats were rapidly built between 1935 and 1941. Modern airports were built in Asmara and Gura.[55] Eritrea became the main military depot as well as the communication and financial center of the Italian East African Empire. As shown in Table 1, Eritrea had more commercial and industrial firms than other provinces of the Italian Empire combined.

Following the heavy Italian investments in Eritrea, a distinct Eritrean identity based on the growing gap between the socio-economic   realities of Eritrea and Ethiopia emerged. This identity was further reinforced by the Italian propaganda that the Italian rule had "civilized" the Eritreans and that Ethiopians were backward and therefore in

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[50] Negash and Tronvoll, *Brothers at War: Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War*, 7–8.

[51] Trevaskis G. N. K., *Eritrea: A Colony in Transition, 1941–52* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 55.

[52] Stephen Longrigg, *A Short History of Eritrea* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1945), 135.

[53] Tekeste Negash, *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea, 1882–1941*(Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1987), 42.

[54] Ibid, 40.

[55] Richard Sherman, *Eritrea, the Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Praeger, 1980), 15.

need of an "Italian civilizing mission"[56] The Italian cooptation of Eritreans in the pacification of the Ethiopian empire further promoted the growth of this identity.

Apart from creating an Eritrean identity, during their rule the Italians encouraged racial divisions. In June 1937, an Italian decree made marriage between Eritreans and Italians an indictable offence.[57] Alazar Tesfa Michael, a prominent Eritrean journalist of the time, aptly described Italian racist policies as follows: "For fifty years of grief and pain we were forced to bear the yoke. We were forced to fight for the Italians in Ethiopia, Libya and Somaliland. In public buses, Eritrean passengers were never allowed to sit with Italians. In Eritrean hospitals, rooms were reserved for Italians. Eritreans were never permitted to use them even if they had money."[58]

## C.    THE BRITISH OCCUPATION

In 1941, the Italians were defeated by joint British imperial, French, and Ethiopian forces and Eritrea fell under the British Military Administration (BMA). The British occupied Eritrea and controlled it for the next eleven years for two main reasons - as a springboard for military operations against the axis powers and to create a strong British sphere of influence in Northeast Africa.[59] To achieve their war objectives, the British preferred to maintain the status quo [Italian system of administration] in order to reduce expenses and save on manpower.

The British saw Eritrea as an unviable state due to its poor natural resource base and geo-politically divided ethnic groups. Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary at the time, described Eritrea as, "an artificial entity which cannot stand by itself."[60] Thus, its existence became uncertain and debates about its future occurred both within Eritrea

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[56] Tekeste Negash, *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea, 1882–1941: Policies, Praxis and Impact* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1987), 154–157.

[57] Russell Warren Howe, *Black Africa from the Colonial Era to Modern Times* (New York, 1966), 139–140. Despite the racial laws which forbade conjugal union between Italians and natives, in 1941 alone, there were 25,000 half-castes in Eritrea.

[58] Alazar Tesfa Michael, "Eritrea Today," *The Ethiopian Herald* 19 August 1946.

[59] Kendie, *The Five Dimensions of the Eritrean Conflict, 1941–2004: Deciphering the Geo-political Puzzle*, 58.

[60] As quoted by the Ethiopian Herald, 16 August 1948. Ernest Bevin (1881–1951) was a prominent British trade union leader who was Minister of Labor in World War II and Foreign Minister in 1945–51.

and the region. Inside Eritrea, the British liberalized the press and allowed the establishment of political parties which began to participate in the debate.[61] These political parties were largely organized along religious and ethnic lines. For instance, the Muslim League (ML) advocated for complete liberation and independence of the serfs of western and northern Eritrea, while the Unionist Party largely composed of Christian highlanders advocated for union with Ethiopia. The Liberal Progressive Party comprising the Tigrinya speaking population from both sides wanted the establishment of an independent Tigrayan state.[62]

In 1947, a Four Power Commission of Investigation (FPCI) composed of the allied powers, the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain and France, visited Eritrea. Their subsequent report, issued in May 1948, was inconclusive because the parties were unable to reach agreement on the status of Eritrea.[63] As a result, the fate of Eritrea was handed over to the United Nations—the newly created body—which subsequently dispatched a five-country commission to assess the situation. Like the FPIC, this commission, composed of Burma, Guatemala, Norway, Pakistan and South Africa, also failed to reach a consensus.[64] In 1950, the UN General Assembly resolved that Eritrea should be federated to Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian crown, but with an autonomous constitution, flag and parliament.[65] This compromise solution to the vexing question of independence or unification served to strengthen and legitimize Ethiopia's claim over Eritrea on the basis of a pre-colonial historical linkage.[66]

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[61] D. C. Cumming, "The Disposal of Eritrea," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1953), 18–32.

[62] A. D. Roberts, *The Cambridge History of Africa, Vol. 8, 1905–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 465.

[63] Four Power Commission (FPC). Four Power Commission on Investigation of Former Italian Colonies. Vol.1, Report on Eritrea, 22 June 1948.

[64] Kendie, 62.

[65] UN Resolution 390 A (V).

[66] Ruth Iyobo, *The Eritrean struggle for Independence: Dominance, Resistance, Nationalism, 1941–1993* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 94.

**Table 1.  Industrial & Commercial Firms in the Italian East African Empire, 1940**[67]

| Province | Number of industrial firms | Number of commercial firms |
|---|---|---|
| Eritrea | 2,198 | 2,690 |
| Somalia | 584 | 659 |
| Shewa | 561 | 634 |
| Harar | 223 | 166 |
| Amara | 163 | 510 |
| Oromo and Sidama | 278 | 126 |

## D.    TERMINATION OF THE ETHIO-ERITREAN FEDERATION

As mentioned above, the Ethio-Eritrean federation was UN-sponsored and backed by Ethiopians. In the words of Bereket Habteselassie, the UN's guarantee of Eritrean autonomy, which was grafted on a feudal system, was "like an antibody imposed on a body politic that was not able or willing to receive it."[68] The UN provided Eritrea with a liberal constitution that had sufficient provisions to safeguard human rights, fundamental freedoms including a system of separation of powers, and checks and balances. In contrast, Ethiopia was governed under the 1931 constitution that was largely inspired by royal absolutism.[69]  Time magazine, aptly, if not cynically, described the Ethio-Eritrean relationship as "a Swiss federation adapted to an African absolute monarchy."[70]

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[67] Source: Tekeste Negash, *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea, 1882–1941: Policies, Praxis and Impact,* 52.

[68] Bereket Habteselassie, *Eritrea and the United Nations* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1980), 40–41.

[69] Kendie, *The Five Dimensions of the Eritrean Conflict, 1941–2004: Deciphering the Geo-political Puzzle*, 104.

[70] Krzeczunowicz, G., "The Regime of Assembly in Ethiopia," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 1. No.1. (Addis Ababa, 1963).

The federal arrangement created both legal as well as structural contradictions between liberal-oriented Eritrea and absolute monarchical Ethiopia.[71] Moreover, Ethiopia's government officials were divided on what "federal status" actually meant. While the progressive and enlightened ministers saw the potential of using Eritrea's institutions as a model for a wider federation of Ethiopian provinces, the centralist ministers argued that Eritrea's example would inspire other provinces to demand a federal status just like Eritrea with all its democratic institutions. This greater degree of liberalization in Eritrea was too risky for Emperor Haile Selassie to tolerate. In 1956, press freedom was curtailed, followed by a total ban on political parties and trade union movements. Further, the Emperor initiated a series of measures to weaken the federation and incorporate Eritrea into Ethiopia. On November 15, 1962, the Eritrean Assembly, under strong pressure from Ethiopia, voted for union with Ethiopia, and Eritrea became the fourteenth province of Ethiopia.[72]

## E. EMERGENCE OF SECESSION MOVEMENTS

The Emperor's ban on trade unions was a shock to many Eritreans. This began the decline of imperial government support by members of Eritrea's working class, many of whom were Christian. Additionally, a backsliding economy and rapidly rising unemployment rates alienated the Ethiopian government from support by poor Eritrean Christians. As a result, when the Emperor terminated the federal arrangement in 1962, many Christian Eritreans, just like their Muslim counterparts, felt that the regime was acting against their core interests. [73]

Emergence of armed radical Eritrean opposition movements had preceded the termination of the federation in 1962. In 1961, the first armed resistance group to emerge

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[71] Iyob, *The Eritrean struggle for Independence: Dominance, Resistance, Nationalism, 1941–1993*, 95.

[72] Kendie, *The Five Dimensions of the Eritrean Conflict, 1941–2004: Deciphering the Geo-political Puzzl*e,105.

[73] John Markakis, "The Nationalist Revolution in Eritrea," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 26. No.1 (1988), 54.

was the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF)[74] in response to the increasing agitation over federal violations.[75] The front immediately launched a protracted militarily and economically debilitating civil war.[76] The ELF couched its resistance in Pan Arab terms using Islam as a tool of national mobilization. The ELF endeavored to establish autonomy independent of Christian Ethiopia.[77] Iraq and Syria were main sponsors as they sought to keep Eritrea as a player in international Arab politics. Discontent grew between the Front and the Christian community of Eritrea. Hence, the ELF ostracized those Christians who had joined its cause simply because it was the sole movement with an organized political agenda at that time. Friction quickly escalated into low-intensity conflict between the Christian and Muslim ELF ranks as well as within officers and high-ranking ELF commanders. When the ELF army was reorganized into armed groups based on regional representation, a distinct Christian army unit emerged, exacerbating internal strife that further weakened the Front[78] The reorganization also led to the breakaway of many predominantly Christian-led groups which later amalgamated and challenged the hegemony of the ELF.[79]

At the beginning of the 1970s, three new groups had established themselves as key actors; the strongest of these was led by Issaias Afewerki. In 1974, Issaias' militia group declared a socialist agenda and branded itself the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). The most significant support for the EPLF was centered in the Christian highlands. Unlike the ELF, the EPLF purported to be non-sectarian and refused to cloak

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[74] The ELF was established as the armed wing of the Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM) that was founded in 1958. ELM was composed mainly of students, intellectuals and urban wage laborers who engaged in clandestine political activities intended to cultivate resistance in urban areas. Its activities were discovered in 1962 and the movement was immediately decimated by the authorities. Also see Bereket Habte Selassie, *Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa* (Monthly Review Press: New York & London, 1980), 61–62.

[75] Pausewang and Shurke, *The Referendum on Independence for Eritrea,* 7.

[76] Kendie, *The Five Dimensions of the Eritrean Conflict, 1941–2004: Deciphering the Geo-political Puzzle*, 155.

[77] Tekeste, *Eritrea and Ethiopia: The Federal Experience*, 150.

[78] Ibid, 152.

[79] Richard Reid, "Old Problems in New Conflicts: Some Observations on Eritrea and its Relations with Tigray, from Liberations struggle to Interstate Wars," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 73, No. 3 (2003), 396.

its political agenda under religiosity. This had the effect of strengthening the EPLF movement's ability to recruit members from the predominantly Muslim lowlands. By the late 1970s, the EPLF appeared to be the dominant political party in Eritrea. Due to steady growth in EPLF military capability, it entered into fierce competition with the ELF. The groups fought each other sporadically through the 1970s, with occasional periods of cease-fire and military co-operation. In 1981, through the combined effort of the EPLF and the newly established Tigrayan front called the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the ELF was expelled from Eritrea and moved into Sudan.[80] Consequently, the EPLF became the dominant and leading guerrilla movement in Eritrea.

## F.      EPLF-TPLF RELATIONS, 1975–1991

John Young, who studied the revolution of the TPLF, characterized its relationship with the ELPF, as "full of tensions and pragmatism."[81] The TPLF was established in 1975 by Tigray students at Addis Ababa University. The EPLF provided military training and supplies to the first TPLF fighters. This new relationship between the two fronts soon became strained, especially when the EPLF entered a new alliance with the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP).[82] Conversely, the TPLF opened relations with the ELF and, as the EPLF-TPLF alliance became more strained, TPLF-ELF relation improved. These overlapping relations put TPLF and ELF in a dilemma throughout 1975-1976 until the EPRP was driven out of Tigray.  In 1976, the TPLF launched its manifesto which defined the major purpose of its resistance to be the establishment of an independent Tigray state.[83]  The EPLF countered that only Eritrea enjoyed a historical legacy that justified the creation of an independent state. The EPLF

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[80] Negash and Tronvoll, *Brothers at War: Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War*, 14.

[81] John Young, "The Tigray and the Eritrean People's Liberation Fronts: a History of Tension and Pragmatism," *Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 34, No. 1. (1996), 105.

[82] TPLF and EPRP were competing liberation movements in Ethiopia with different ideologies. EPRP's ideology was premised on the principle that class contradictions within Ethiopia were the key contradiction while TPLF premised their ideology on contradiction of nationalities-Ethiopian nation and Tigray nation. Also see Negash and Tronvoll, 13.

[83] Ibid, 15.

countered the TLPF manifesto arguing for the need of a more democratic Ethiopia and refusing to acknowledge the potential for the TPLF agenda of Tigray statehood.[84]

Despite the two fronts being ideologically socialist, they disagreed over Soviet policy. At that time, the USSR supported the Derg regime in Ethiopia which was at war with both the EPLF and TPLF. The EPLF saw the potential of garnering support from the Soviet Union and gaining a strategic ally. For its part, the TPLF labeled the Soviet Union as a "social imperialist" enemy, which along with the Derg was to be resisted. To highlight its discontent, the TPLF renounced Soviet socialism in favor of the more "self-reliant" Albanian model of socialism.[85]

The two fronts also disagreed over military doctrine, political goals, and the treatment of prisoners of war (POWs). As far as military tactics was concerned, the EPLF adopted conventional trench warfare which entailed holding a position and then systematically liberating adjacent areas and defending them from enemy attack. Conversely, the TPLF was averse to fixed warfare since it alienated the movement from the masses it was supposed to liberate. They also criticized the so-called "war of position" as ineffective in the face of the heavily armed Ethiopian forces. Mobile guerilla hit and run tactics were more effective.[86] Regarding POWs, for security reasons the EPLF not only failed to liberate or exchange its prisoners, it also required them to participate in forced labor, working especially in construction and agriculture, as allowed by the Geneva Convention. The TPLF did not incorporate POWs into the system of laborers, nor did it consider them as threats to internal security. Rather, the TPLF educated prisoners on its political agenda, granting them an opportunity to enlist in the TPLF army, seek repatriation at home, or move to Sudanese refugee camps.[87]

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[84] TPLF and EPRP were competing liberation movements in Ethiopia with different ideologies. EPRP's ideology was premised on the principle that class contradictions within Ethiopia were the key contradiction while TPLF premised their ideology on contradiction of nationalities-Ethiopian nation and Tigray nation. Also see Negash and Tronvoll, 13 and Gilkes and Plaut, 7.

[85] Young, "The Tigray and the Eritrean People's Liberation Fronts" 115.

[86] Ibid, 108

[87] Ibid, 111.

Despite these distinctions, the armies cooperated pragmatically on several critical occasions. For example, the EPLF had provided military training and arms to TPLF fighters from the establishment of the TPLF movement. The TPLF gave the EPLF crucial military support during its clashes with the ELF in 1981. Moreover, in 1983, TPLF troops had a significant role in saving the EPLF from an annihilating attack on its base area (Nakfa) mounted by Derg forces during their "Red Star Campaign."[88] The siege by Ethiopian government forces would have certainly destroyed the EPLF movement.

Essentially, the groups' political differences revolved around whether the right to self-determination included the right of secession. The TPLF openly granted the right of all tribes and nationalities of Ethiopia to self-determination, short of secession. It argued that the self-determination demanded by Tigrayans and Ethiopians should also to apply to the Eritrean population. For the TPLF, if Eritrea planned for a democratic future, it should thereby permit the right of self-determination and secession for any "nations" within its borders. The EPLF, on the other hand, maintained that there should be no secession in democracies. It further clarified that although the right to secede might extend to oppressed groups, the principle of "democratic unity" should make secession unnecessary.[89]

Strong debates within TPLF's leadership about the Front's alliance with the EPLF continued into the late 1980s. In 1985, the TPLF labeled the EPLF as "undemocratic," refusing to consider secession and defining its partnership with EPLF as one that was distinctly "tactical." It withdrew its support and manpower from Eritrea. The TPLF sponsored competing movements in Eritrea, namely the Democratic Marxist League (DML) of Eritrea. The EPLF, in turn, responded by eliminating most cooperative efforts with the TPLF including closure of the TPLF's radio station in Eritrea. The EPLF dealt

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[88] Gilkes and Plaut, *War in the Horn: The Conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia,* 7.

[89] Reid, "Old Problems in New Conflicts: Some Observations on Eritrea and its Relations with Tigray, from Liberations struggle to Interstate Wars," 385.

the TPLF the worst blow during the serious famine of Tigray (1984–1985) by blocking the Sudan-Tigray route. This blockade rendered it impossible for TPLF to deliver emergency food aid to the people of Tigray.[90]

Overlapping periods of tensions between the two fronts continued until 1988. Nonetheless, by 1988, the fronts had won important victories both in Eritrea and Ethiopia. For example, the TPLF was able to control most of Tigray while the EPLF had won the battle of Afabe and in the process captured significant arms from the Ethiopian government's forces. Inspired by their victories and the weakening of the military regime in Addis Ababa, the fronts realized that their cooperation was invaluable in defeating the Derg. In April 1988, following four days of negotiations in Khartoum, the two fronts reestablished a military alliance which finally decimated the Derg in 1991.

## G. INTERNATIONAL INTERESTS

### 1. The United States

Ethiopian-American relations officially began with the signing of the Treaty of Commerce of December 27, 1903, and with personal interest of President Theodore Roosevelt in the Skinner Mission to Ethiopia. By 1927, American interests had expanded to include mica concessions, petroleum exploration concessions, health and education.[91] On August 29, 1935, the African Exploration and Development Corporation was awarded a 75-year concession covering nearly half of Ethiopia to explore, prospect, drill and extract both oil and natural gas. However, for security reasons, the U.S. State Department cancelled these agreements and requested its citizens to evacuate Ethiopia. Consequently, the U.S did not participate in Ethiopia's struggle with the Italians that took place between 1935 to 1941.[92]

During the Eisenhower administration, the United States cooperated with Ethiopia for political and strategic reasons. Politically, the United States used Ethiopia to fight its

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[90] Young, "The Tigray and the Eritrean People's Liberation Fronts," 116.

[91] Kendie, *The Five Dimensions of the Eritrean Conflict, 1941–2004: Deciphering the Geo-political Puzzl*e, 304–305.

[92] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1943, vol. 4, 103–109.

war with Russia in Somalia. This was the strategy of "Politica Sciana."[93] During debates on Eritrea's federation to Ethiopia, the U.S. argued against an independent Eritrea on grounds that it would be a "weak state exposed to Soviet aggression and infiltration."[94]

In addition, Ethiopia's geo-strategic location offered a perfect communication site, Radio Marina - renamed "Kagnew Station," – which had the capacity to transmit and receive radio signals from Washington, the Middle East, Europe, North Africa, and the Pacific. It also served as a listening post on all transmissions in the Middle East and Africa.[95] In 1952, the United States and Ethiopia signed a defense pact that included a 25-year lease of Kagnew. In return, Washington granted Ethiopia military assistance and training.[96] By virtue of the communication station, Ethiopia became part of the "Southern Tier"[97] line of defense against communism and its contribution to the West in the Cold War was considered essential.

The United States took strong interest in Ethiopia and therefore granted it both development aid and military assistance from 1952 to1976[98] with the aim of changing Ethiopia into a pro-Western state, mitigating the Soviet Union's economic initiatives while fostering the moderate evolution of the society by improving living conditions and increasing consumption levels. However, during this "honeymoon" period, Ethiopian-U.S. relations became strained when Washington declined to arm and modernize the Ethiopian Army, which forced Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie to play his "Soviet

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[93] This was the strategy employed by foreign powers to promote their economic, political and cultural influence in Ethiopia through the centre (the emperors). The opposite is the strategy "Politica Tigrigna" which involved use of periphery to subvert and undermine the centre.

[94] Kendie, *The Five Dimensions of the Eritrean Conflict, 1941–2004: Deciphering the Geo-political Puzzl*e, 315.

[95] John Rusmusen, *A History of Kagnew Station and American Forces in Eritrea* (Arlington, VA: U.S. Army Security Agency, Information Division, 1973), 26.

[96] Kendie, *The Five Dimensions of the Eritrean Conflict, 1941–2004: Deciphering the Geo-political Puzzl*e, 321.

[97] This is the secondary line of defense against communism in the Middle East.

[98] According to Zebib Asfaha, by 1976, the United States had injected more than $600 million worth of aid into Ethiopia as payment for the base with 50 percent going into military training. See Zebib Asfaha**,** "U.S. Conspiracy in federating Eritrea with Ethiopia," at: http://dehai.org/demarcation-watch/articles/Zebib_Asfaha_US_conspiracy_in_federating_Eritrea_with_Ethiopia.html (accessed August 10, 2010).

card." Although Haile Selassie had once described the USSR "as the world's greatest power," he had also tried to maintain good relations with both East and West.[99] In 1960, when Ethiopia dared to turn to Moscow, Washington revised its stand and agreed to arm and train Ethiopia's military, as well as protect Ethiopia from any aggressors.[100] On September 13, 1974, the Ethiopian military ousted Emperor Haile Selassie and replaced him with Mengistu Haile Mariam.

### 2.    The Soviet Union

The Soviet Union's interests in Ethiopia pre-dated the October Revolution of 1917. Their historical ties mainly centered on their histories and structures. According to Kendie, these early relations emerged from an "assumed" spiritual and confessional kinship, and from a perceived need to face a common enemy—the Ottoman Turkish state.[101]  The Russians supported Ethiopian nationalists as a strategy to undermine rival European power in the area. In 1895, Russia offered Ethiopia arms and military training as well as advice, which facilitated their victory over Italians in the battle of Adowa in 1896. Russian officers served in the Ethiopian army and even participated in establishing the country's borders. By 1920, Ethiopia had become a sanctuary for Russian professionals evacuated from the Crimea by the White Army.[102]

In 1964, Russia supplied arms to both Ethiopia and Somalia during their clashes over Ogaden, yet at the same time offered to mediate the conflict.[103] During Eritrea's armed struggle in the 1960s, the Soviet Union used its proxies—Syria, China, Cuba, and

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[99] Kendie, *The Five Dimensions of the Eritrean Conflict, 1941–2004: Deciphering the Geo-political Puzzl*e, 324.

[100] Jeffrey Levebvre,  *Arms for the Horn, U.S. Security Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia, 1953–1991* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 94–101.

[101] Ibid., 312.

[102] Ibid., 322.

[103] Kendie, *The Five Dimensions of the Eritrean Conflict, 1941–2004: Deciphering the Geo-political Puzzl*e, 324.

Egypt—to train and arm the ELF.[104] The arms surge in both Eritrea and Somalia threatened the existence of Ethiopia. China rescued the country in 1971 by supplying arms in order to defeat the ELF insurrection.[105]

## H.    CONCLUSION

The evolution of Ethiopia and Eritrea, with Ethiopia being among the oldest polities in the world, has been discussed in this chapter. Eritrea came into existence in 1890 as the first Italian colony in Africa. Eritrea then fell under the British military administration from 1941 to 1952 following Italy's defeat by the allied powers. The Italians benefited from Eritrea's geo-strategic location to further their commercial, military and resettlement objectives. They created racial tensions within Eritrea as well as a distinct Eritrean identity that separated the Eritreans from Ethiopians. In 1950, the UN federated Eritrea to Ethiopia, but granted Eritrea its own liberal constitution that guaranteed individual freedoms and rights. This federation was terminated by Emperor Haile Selassie in 1962 when Eritrea was annexed as Ethiopia's fourteenth province. This annexation marked the beginning of Eritrea's armed struggle for independence via liberation movements.

The main liberation movements, EPLF and TPLF, cooperated to overthrow the Derg regime in Addis Ababa in 1991 and formed transitional governments in Eritrea and Ethiopia respectively. The tensions and contradictions between the EPLF and TPLF trace their origin to their differences in military doctrine, ideology and the need for self-determination. Despite their cooperation in crucial moments that led to their victories, the two fronts continued with tensions even after Eritrea's independence in 1991. These differences came to be exploited when the border and trade disputes arose. These disputes will be analyzed in the next chapter.

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[104] Haggai Erlich, *The Struggle Over Eritrea, 1962–1978: War and Revolution in the Horn of Africa* (Stanford, CA: Hoovers Institute Press, 1983), 133. See also The New York Times, 3 March 1967.

[105] Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, *The Ethiopia Revolution* (London: NLB, 1981), 258.

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# III.   THE ROOT CAUSES OF THE WAR

## A.   INTRODUCTION

Although a border dispute was the immediate cause of the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea from 1998 to 2000, there were underlying causes deeply rooted in the two countries' historical backgrounds. As Birger Heldet asserts, "a territorial dispute is virtually necessary but not [a] sufficient condition for interstate war."[106]  In trying to decode the causes of this interstate conflict, this thesis shall utilize Kenneth Waltz's "level of analysis framework" that integrates three levels of analysis—the individual, the nation-state (national), and the systemic or international system.[107] At the individual level, the focus is on human nature and predisposition towards aggression. The national level includes the government variables that lead to war. The systemic level explains the distribution of power and the international environment. Thus, the causes of the Ethiopia-Eritrean war will be better understood as an interaction within these three levels both in time and space.

## B.   INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and Eritrean President Issayas Afeworki each played a crucial role in the eruption of the conflict. Both had been successful guerrilla leaders of their respective liberation movements, the TPLF and EPLF, but did not develop into statesmen after ascending to power. Both regimes have a political culture of totalitarian rule where absolute power is taken for granted.[108] As Habte Selassie notes, "the leadership of both countries is a battle hardened lot in which military

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[106] Birger Heldet, "Domestic Politics, Absolute Deprivation, and Use of Armed Forces in Interstate Territorial Disputes, 1950–1990," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 43, 3 (1999), 451.

[107] Karl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton University Press, 1976), 149.

[108] Jon Abbink, "Briefing: The Ethio-Eritrean Border Dispute," *African Affairs*, Vol. 97, No. 389. (1998), 557.

expediency dictates the order of things, and the concept of democracy is a rather new word in their vocabulary and its practice has yet to see the light of day."[109]

According to the Horn of Africa Program director, Kjetil Tronvoll, whereas Issayas was ambitious and dictatorial, Meles remained weak and soft in handling Ethiopian affairs with Eritrea.[110] Former U.S President Jimmy Carter, who met Meles Zenawi in 1989, remembers:

> When I used to meet Meles during my visits to the region, he would spread his war maps on the floor and described his progress against Mengistu's forces. After Meles prevailed in 1991 and despite my concerns about the Eritrean leadership, he granted Eritrea complete independence in 1993, cutting Ethiopia off from the Red Sea and making it the most populous landlocked nation in the world.[111]

Meles Zenawi who shares the same ethnic group—Tigrinya—as Issayas Afeworki, has been criticized by the independent media for sacrificing Ethiopia's economic interests to the point that he was derisively nicknamed: "Eritrea's Ambassador to Ethiopia."[112] Ethiopia's opposition press once noted: "Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has played a key role in the secession of Eritrea. The prime minister's mother voted in public in the referendum for secession. As things stand, we are facing war with Eritrea. Ato Meles can apologize to the Ethiopian people and/or restore our natural seaport. Then can he expect forgiveness."[113] In a 1999 interview, Meles indicated that he was optimistic that Eritrea would federate with Ethiopia, although the basis of his "optimism" is unclear.[114]

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[109] Elias Habte Selassie, "The Ethio-Eritrean Conflict: A Clash Between Incompatible Identities," *Life and Peace Institute, Nairobi* (March 2001), 3.

[110] Kjetil and Tronvoll, "From War to Peace and Back to War Again? The Failure of UN/OAU to Create Sustainable Peace Between Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Prospects for Peace, Security and Human Rights in Africa's Horn* (Bergen: Fgbokfolaget, 2004), 50–60.

[111] Jimmy Carter, "Ethiopia Trip: May 11–17, 2005" *News and Information, The Carter Center*, 19 May 2005.

[112] Lata, "The Search for Peace: The Conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea," 35.

[113] Fiyemeta, Amharic Newspaper, Addis Ababa, February 3, 1999.

[114] Lata, "The Search for Peace: The Conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea," 73 and Alemseged Tesfai, "The Causes of Eritrean-Ethiopian Border Conflict," at http://www.dehai.org/conflict/analysis/alemsghed1.html (accessed April 27, 2010).

As in Ethiopia, the power of the Eritrean president is unencumbered by regulatory mechanisms or civilian advisors,[115] which allows President Afeworki to make unilateral decisions. His only trusted political allies were generals upon whom he relied for advice.[116] Indeed, the border issue had featured in discussions between 1993 to 1997 and remained unresolved. Territorial dispute was just an excuse for rather than the cause of Isaayas' decision to go to war with Ethiopia. The mobilization of the Eritrean army on May 12, 1998, in response to clashes at the border village of Badme, on presidential orders without consulting any political party, parliament, or the cabinet, attest to the centralized nature of Eritrea's decision making. Despite Issayas' reputation for "keeping his head in a crisis,"[117] this decision proved to be a miscalculation that showcased his failure to anticipate that Ethiopians would put aside their differences in the face of an Eritrean threat, as they had against the Italians in 1896 and the Somalis in 1977, rather than fragment into ethnic camps.[118] Moreover, Issayas believed that war would bolster his political power in Eritrea as well as bring a regime change in Addis Ababa that would force Ethiopia to shelve its ambitious industrialization program and revert to the free trade agreement.[119]

## C. NATIONAL LEVEL

### 1. Nation-State Building in Eritrea

In newly created states, crash programs of state and nation-building when pursued simultaneously can pose challenges that may tempt leadership to resort to coercive

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[115] Mengisteab and Yohannes, *Anatomy of an African Tragedy: Political, Economic and Foreign Policy Crisis in Post-Independent Eritrea,* 261.

[116] Dan Connell, "Enough! A critique of Eritrea's Post-Liberation Politics," AllAfrica.com, (2003), 9. At: http//www.allafrica.com/stories/200311060876.html (accessed July 19, 2010).

[117] Lata, "The Search for Peace: The Conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea," 35.

[118] Franklin Steves, "Regime Change and War: Domestic Politics and the Escalation of Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol.16 (2003), 131.

[119] This revelation is contained in an anonymous document which I shall denote as Anonymous, "The Ethiopia-Eritrean War," at http://pdfs.rowmanlittlefield.com/RL/_Et/RL_EthiopiaEritreaCaseStudy.pdf, 41 (accessed July 15, 2010).

measures.[120] Soon after independence in 1991, the Eritrean government declared its development vision—to become the next Singapore by 2015—by maintaining an open economy with service and export orientation.[121]According to the President of Addis Ababa University, Eshete Endreas, Eritrea's desire to realize this vision was the main cause of the border conflict with Ethiopia.[122] Eritrea aspired to become the hegemony in the Horn of Africa and a "big player" in the international arena. To support this vision, Eritrea sought to forge a national identity through military adventures against all its relatively weak neighbors—Yemen, Djibouti and Sudan. Eritrea clashed with Sudan over Islamic militants as well as with both Yemen and Djibouti over territory.[123] Ultimately, Eritrea picked a quarrel with what it perceived to be a weak and divided Ethiopia in order to bolster its regional position.

## 2.    Diversionary War

States, when faced with domestic crises, resort to *scapegoating* to divert public attention. According to U.S. political scientists Clifton Morgan and Kenneth Bickers, state leaders adopt diversionary tactics when faced with the loss of support from social groups that form the main constituent in the ruling coalition.[124] In early 1998, there was a political revolt within TPLF ranks against Meles Zenawis' rule after opposition political parties accused Meles of allowing Eritrea to exploit Ethiopia economically.[125] Meles

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[120] Mohammad Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State-Making, Regional Conflict, and International System* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 30–31.

[121]  Lata, "The Search for Peace: The Conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea," 58

[122] Eshete Endreas, 'The Ethio-Eritrean Conflict: Political and Legal Dimensions," *Cambridge: Harvard University, Centre for International Affairs* (1998), 11.

[123]  Steves, "Regime Change and War: Domestic Politics and the Escalation of Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict," 125.

[124] Clifton T. Morgan and Kenneth N. Bickers, "Domestic Discontent and the External Use of Force," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol. 36, No. 1. (1992), 20.

[125] Anonymous, "The Ethiopia-Eritrean War," 31.

reacted by consolidating his power within Ethiopia. When local clashes started in Badme, Meles seized the opportunity to overwhelm the opposition by posing as "a champion of Tigray."[126]

Unlike other African states approaching independence, Eritrea did not receive any preparation for statehood in the form of a legacy from a colonizing power. Instead, Eritrea's statehood came at the end of a bitter thirty-year liberation struggle with an Ethiopian regime that had neglected its development. Nor was its development helped by an international economic recession and a prolonged drought.[127] In the intervening years, the TPLF and EPLF did not take adequate steps to address the basic needs and aspirations of their people. According to Milikias Paulos, a professor of Humanities and Political Science at Marian Polis College, internal economic pressures drove the two states into war to avoid public criticism.[128]

### 3. Public Perception

As already discussed, the EPLF was involved in the training of the TPLF at its early stages, and tended to treat the front as its "junior partner." This caused Ethiopian Tigrayans to feel patronized by Eritreans, especially when they recall having taken low-paying jobs in Eritrea as casual laborers, domestic servants, woodcutters, potters, housemaids, waitresses, and even as prostitutes. Eritreans denigrated these Tigrayans as *agame*—a term used to describe uncouth peasants. Conversely, Eritreans took up skilled jobs in Ethiopia and invested heavily in businesses. According to BBC correspondent Martin Plaut, class cleavages, privilege, snobbery and envy all served to fuel animosities between the former allies.[129]

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[126] Anonymous, "The Ethiopia-Eritrean War," 31.

[127] David Pool, "Eritrea Independence: The Legacy of the Derg and the Politics of Reconstruction," *African Affairs* Vol. 92, No. 368 (July 1993), 390–391.

[128] Milkias Paulos, "Ethiopia and Eritrea at War: Saga of Triumph and Tragedy at the Dawn of Millennium," *Horn of Africa* Vol. 17. No. 1–4.

[129] Martin Plaut, "Background to war: From Friends to Foes," at: http://www.ascleiden.nl/pdf/paper1108459195.pdf (accessed July 24, 2010).

### 4.   Economic Tensions

Oh, *nakfa* you are an indefatigable grave digger
First for the enemy
And now the defender,
The instability you suffer I did hear
But your stolidity in your children that you now bear
I dare say but that you are a double dealer.[130]

Many Ethiopians believe that economics lies at the core of the conflict.[131] According to Patrick Gilkes and Martin Plaut, economic issues were crucial to both the origins and development of this conflict.[132] Economic controversies were the only publicly declared differences between the two states prior to the war.   When Eritrea seceded from Ethiopia in 1991, Ethiopian currency—the *bir*—continued to be used as the *de facto* currency within the two states. In 1992, Assab was established as a free port for Ethiopia through the Transit Trade Agreement.[133] By September 27, 1993, a total of twenty-five protocols, branded the Asmara Pact, had been signed by the two states, which included among other things a joint defense pact, agreements on harmonization of monetary and fiscal policies, and the establishment of a free trade area.[134] However, these agreements lacked details on some crucial issues, including the citizenship of Ethiopians in Eritrea and Eritreans in Ethiopia, the mode of payment in trade transactions, and the disposal of the *bir* in circulation in Eritrea once Eritrea adopted its own currency. Despite inherent shortcomings in these agreements and lack of pragmatic

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[130] Haileselassie Girmay, "Ethiopia - Eritrea Border Conflict: The Role Nakfa Played," Vol. 1, No. 2, http://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/articles/articles/focus%20electronic-99/Haileselassie%20Girmay%20-1.htm (accessed May 27, 2010).

[131] Leenco Lata, "The Search for Peace: The Conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea," Allkopi AS (2006), 58, http://www.fafo.no/pub/rapp/20014/20014.pdf (accessed April 27, 2010).

[132] Patrick Gilkes and Martin Plaut, *War in The Horn: The Conflict Between Eritrea and Ethiopia* (Chatham House, 1999), 13.

[133] United Nations Development Program. Project of the State of Eritrea (New York: UNDP, 1993), 3.

[134] Gilkes and Plaut, 13; Mengisteab and Yohannes, 229–230, and  Negash and Tronvoll, 32–33.

implementation by both states, this cooperation[135] enabled them to revitalize their respective economies and register considerable progress in the short term as depicted in Figure 5. Between 1993 and 1996, over 60 percent of Eritrea's exports went to Ethiopia.[136] Additionally, Eritrea earned about 150 million bir annually from dues and port charges.[137]

Table 2.  Eritrea's Trade with Ethiopia (in bir)[138]

| Year | Imports | Exports | Balance |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1993 | 63,968,197 | 123,579,747 | 59,611,550 |
| 1994 | 90,796,808 | 181,491,011 | 90,694,203 |
| 1995 | 146,820,200 | 259,700,000 | 112,880,000 |
| 1996 | 261,781,354 | 273,400,000 | 11,618,646 |
| 1997 | 274,600,000 | 218,200,000 | -56,400,000 |

As previously discussed, Eritrea adopted a service and export oriented model of economic development that would propel it into a regional centre of financial services akin to that of Singapore. Ethiopia, on the other hand, adopted import substitution industrialization (ISI). The economic harmonization pacts between Ethiopia and Eritrea had envisaged the idea of specialization in which Eritrea would be the industrial powerhouse and use its ports to become an import and export zone, while Ethiopia would be the agricultural supplier.[139]

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[135] Northern Ethiopia and Eritrea were so economically intertwined such that political boundaries were irrelevant to the inhabitants. According to Professor Tekie Fessehazion, this economic harmony was analogous to Siamese twins joined at the back and naturally looking in opposite directions. Also see Tekie Fessehazion, "Eritrea and Ethiopia Relations: A Nakfa/Birr/LC Analysis," at http://www.denden.com/Conflict/newscom/com-tek98.htm (accessed June 18, 2010).

[136] Government of Eritrea, Customs Office, 1998 and World Bank, 1994. Also cited in Mengisteab and Yohannes, 251.

[137] Negash and Tronvoll, *Brothers at War: Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War*, 42–43.

[138] Source: Government of Eritrea, Customs Office, 1998.

[139] Lara Santora, "At the Root of an Odd African War," *Christian Science Monitor* June 22, 1998.

Between 1993 and 1996, contrary to the economic accord of the Asmara Pact, Ethiopia changed its development strategy and decided to develop its industrial base, with most industries concentrated in the Tigray region. These industries were similar to those in Eritrea and had the capacity to meet local demands and export the surplus to other parts of the country.[140] To protect its nascent industries, Ethiopia adopted a protectionist policy by imposing indirect taxes, embarkation charges and development fees on all Eritrean goods entering the Tigray region (*Kelil*),[141] making Eritrean goods less competitive in the Ethiopian market. This created unfavorable terms of trade for Eritrea since Ethiopian goods were allowed to enter freely into Eritrean markets and not subject to any taxes.

In early 1997, Asmara forwarded a series of proposals to Addis Ababa including a phased introduction of its own currency, the *nakfa*, beginning in July, allowing both currencies to circulate on either side of the border and retaining a 1:1 *bir/nakfa* parity and periodic settlement of imbalances using dollars. Ethiopia flatly rejected these proposals and stated that it would not accept parity of the two currencies due to the different economic policies pursued by the two states (Eritrea favored a free market policy while Ethiopia pursed a closed market policy).[142] Ethiopia's monetary policy, coupled with the new shift into industrialization became a threat to Eritrea's economy. Economic tensions spiraled when Eritrea issued its new currency on November 1, 1997. By late 1997, both states began imposing unilateral economic policies that further strained their relationship. Ethiopia demanded that its trade relations with Eritrea be henceforth formalized, and all cross border transactions (less petty exchanges valued less than 2,000 bir or U.S $250) be undertaken using hard currency (U.S. dollars) and letters of credit (L/C). Additionally, Ethiopia issued its new *bir* notes illustrated with a tiny inset map of Ethiopia that incorporated the disputed border (Figure 4)[143] with the aim of preventing the

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[140] Negash and Tronvoll, *Brothers at War: Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War*, 40–41.

[141] Kelil is a Tigrinya term meaning an area or region.

[142] Negash and Trovoll, *Brothers at War: Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War*, 35.

[143] The new bir note with an tiny inset map indicating an enlarged Ethiopia fuelled suspicion between the two states and Eritreans began to claim that Tigrayan 'ethno-nationalist aspirations' could decoded from the shape of the borders incorporated in the map.

recirculation into Ethiopia's economy of all *bir* redeemed for *nakfa* in Eritrea.[144] Due to foreign currency restrictions and increased competition from subsidized factories in Tigray, demand for Eritrean industrial goods in Ethiopia plummeted. In retaliation for Ethiopia's revised economic arrangement, Eritrea imposed heavy levies on all products imported and exported by Ethiopia through its ports.[145]

It can be argued that prior to the outbreak of war in May 1998; each state pursued a protectionist policy to shield its interests, policies that endangered Eritrea's state-building project. Eritrea's vulnerability to Ethiopia's economic policy shifts was a factor that persuaded Afewerki to use force. According to Franklin Steves, Eritrean industrialists pressured Afewerki to protect their interests.[146] According to this interpretation, that Eritrean air strikes were directed against industries in Tigray as war intensified in June 1998 is hardly a coincidence. As Lara Santoro aptly put it, "it was clear what they (the Eritreans) were up to: they wanted to wipe out the competition."[147]



**Figure 4.     Outline of "enlarged" Ethiopia on a 100 bir note (1997)[148]**

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[144] Gilkes and Plaut, *War in The Horn: The Conflict Between Eritrea and Ethiopia*, 14; and Steves, "Regime Change and War: Domestic Politics and the Escalation of Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict," 126.

[145] Anonymous, "The Ethiopia-Eritrean War," 37.

[146] Steves, "Regime Change and War: Domestic Politics and the Escalation of Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict," 127.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Hans van der Splinter, "Background to the border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia," at: http://www.eritrea.be/old/eritrea-ethiopia.htm (accessed June 5, 2010).

### 5. Political Tensions/Ethnicity

After the fall of the Derg, Ethiopia and Eritrea followed different political paths. For fear of ethnic conflicts within the country, Ethiopia adopted a decentralized federal system based on ethnic federalism in an attempt to diffuse potential ethnic conflict. The constitution enacted in 1995 stipulated the autonomy of ethnic regions, up to and including the right to secede. The TPLF believed that devolution of power would insure unity in Ethiopia.[149] However, shortly after 1991, the TPFL (being the ruling party) took the decision to marginalize other members of the EPRDF coalition. The marginalized parties have radicalized, challenging Meles to take a more militant policy on the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea.[150] Conversely, Eritrea pursued a unitary state system in which ethnic identities have no independent political voice. The Eritrean constitution outlawed religious or ethnic based parties.[151]

### 6. Nature of the Regimes

According to the democratic peace theory, democratic states rarely go to war with one another. On the other hand, transitional democracies tend to be more war-prone as compared to either established democracies or stable non-democratic states.[152] Within a transition period, the likelihood of interstate war increases as the political leaders manipulate and mobilize national support to shore up their domestic political standing in the absence of strong political institutions.

Both the TPLF and EPLF formed transitional governments (after the fall of the Derg) in Addis Ababa and Asmara respectively and claimed commitment to democratic

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[149] Assefaw Bariagaber, "The politics of Cultural Pluralism in Ethiopia and Eritrea: Trajectories of Ethnicity and Constitutional Experiments," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21 (November 1998), 1064; and Jon, 556.

[150] Institute of Development and Education for Africa, Inc., "Mirage Politics and the Ethiopian Elections," at http://www.africanidea.org/mirage/html (accessed July 31, 2010).

[151] Gilkes and Plaut, *War in the Horn: The Conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia*, 12.

[152] Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Synder, "Democratization and the Danger of War," *International Security* Vol. 20 (Summer 1995), 79–80.

reforms.[153] However, during the 1990s, these claims of genuine democracy became lip-service as the regimes relapsed into classic autocracies. As Jon Abbink posits, "the governments in Ethiopia and Eritrea have shown indifference towards the spirit and institutions of democracy, dialogue and impartial justice, in favor (sic) of political control and regime stability."[154] Eritrea has witnessed gross human rights violation, press censorship; government critics have been jailed, and the state institutions are subordinated to the whims of the president.[155] A former EPLF supporter, Dan Connell, laments: "During the decade since independence, the president and his close allies have squeezed the 'liberty' out of liberation and left only the seductive shell of a top-down egalitarian development project."[156] In Ethiopia, political parties are repressed, human and civil rights are violated, and national election irregularities have continued unabated since 1992.[157] According to Connell, the use of state coercion against domestic challenges coupled by extreme political flux led the two states into war.[158]

## D.    INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

At the international level, attention is focused on the colonial legacy and how it contributed to war, as well as how major powers influenced both war and peace. Eritrea as a state was created as an Italian colony in 1890. The Italians invested heavily in Eritrea and imparted a distinct Eritrean identity tied to better socio-economic conditions. Eritreans developed a sense of being "civilized" and regarded Ethiopians as "backward."[159] In one interview, Eritrean President Issayas once said, "We have lived with Europeans; we have seen much of the civilized world. There are many things we

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[153] Gilbert M. Khadiagala, *Europe in African's Renewal: Beyond Postcolonial? In Africa in World Politics: The African State System in Flux. 3rd edition* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 92.

[154]  Jon, "Briefing: The Ethio-Eritrean Border Dispute," *African Affairs*, 97, 389 (1998), 558.

[155] Sara Rich Dorman, "Eritrea's Nation and State-building: Re-assessing the impact of 'the struggle'" *Paper presented at the Conference on Globalization and Self-Determination* (London, April 4, 2003), 6 and Gilkes and Plaut, 12.

[156] Connell, "Enough! A critique of Eritrea's Post-Liberation Politics," 12.

[157] Annonymous, "The Ethiopia-Eritrean War," 22.

[158] Connell, "Enough! A critique of Eritrea's Post-Liberation Politics," 10.

[159] Negash, *Brothers at War: Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War*, 154–157.

have learned from them. The Ethiopians, on the contrary, have just come out of the forest. They are not civilized. They feel inferior because they have come out of the bush."[160] Eritrea also raised several claims including unilaterally overthrowing the Derg, defeating Ethiopia despite Addis Ababa having received support from the U.S and Russia, and outwitting the superpowers. This glorified self-image was used to build a new national identity anchored in the belief that "Eritreans could overcome insurmountable obstacles." According to Leencho Lata, this new identity fomented by Eritrean leadership was instrumental in convincing Eritreans that they could prevail in a conflict with their neighbor.[161]

The absence of an overarching governing structure within the international system provides conditions for war to occur. However, with the existence of a unipolar system, power is concentrated in the leading state which makes the system more peaceful.[162] According to hegemonic stability theory, the dominant power creates regimes with defined norms, rules, procedures and organizing principles that guide the actions of states, and from which all states that adhere to the regime benefit.[163] Hegemony may create peace and security within the system to serve a state's own self-interests, or remain either partially or fully disengaged from preventing or solving a conflict within the system when that state's interests are not jeopardized.

Following the end of the Cold War, abortive interventions in Lebanon (1980s) and Somalia (1993), and the Rwandan genocide (1994), the U.S deescalated its security and development commitments to Africa. In March and April 1998, former President Bill Clinton visited Africa and expressed America's support for the betterment of Africa, but

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[160] Solomon Inquai, "Key Determinants of the Ethio-Eritrea crisis," *Walta Information Center, Addis Ababa* (1998), 15.

[161] Lata, "The Search for Peace: The Conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea," 58.

[162] William Wohlforth C., "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 24 (1999), 23.

[163] Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kauppi. *International Relations Theory: Realism, Pluralism, Globalism* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 57–58, 602.

this was backed by neither strategic nor financial commitment.[164] However, when the Ethio-Eritrean war broke out in 1998, the United States immediately intervened, although without great effect.

In the early 1990s, the United States increased financial assistance to the new regimes in Ethiopia and Eritrea in order to stabilize the region. Between 1991 and 1994, aid to Ethiopia rose from $57 million to $168 million and thereafter plummeted by fifty percent by 1997. In the case of Eritrea,[165] the total aid amounted to $28 million in 1994 and declined to $17 million in 1997.[166] This decline in aid lowered the Clinton Administrations' effectiveness in influencing behavior before the 1998 war. The partial disengagement of the United States incentivized Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania, China and North Korea to sell arms to both Ethiopia and Eritrea, both before and during the war.[167] Moreover, for fear of radicalizing the combatants, Washington allowed the World Bank to grant aid to both countries throughout the war.[168] However, with good intentions, prior to the war, the U.S provided military aid in form of communication equipment and transport aircraft to both Ethiopia and Eritrea for containment of the National Islamic Front government in Sudan.[169] It is therefore clear that the failure of the United States to effectively resolve the conflict coupled by its selective policy choices were permissive causes of the war.

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[164] Annonymous, "The Ethiopia-Eritrean War," 22.

[165] Since independence, Eritrea adopted a policy of self reliance and has refrained from accepting external aid and relies on remittances from Eritreans in diaspora. These remittances constitute 30 percent of GDP. See Gaim Kibreab, "The Eritrean Diaspora, the War of Independence, Post-Conflict (Re)-construction and Democratization," 104 at: http://www.radiodaljir.com/audio/docs/TheRoleOfTheDiasporas.pdf (accessed June 5, 2010).

[166] Statistical abstract of the United States: 2002, 790. Also cited in Ibid, 20.

[167] Statistical abstract of the United States: 2002, 790. Also cited in Ibid, 20.

[168] New York Times May 22, 2000.

[169] Zenebeworke Tadesse, "The Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict," 113, at: http://www.conflicttransform.net/Eritrea%20&%20Ethiopia.pdf (accessed July 20, 2010).

## E.    CONCLUSION

The root causes of the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict are varied and can be better understood through the three levels of analysis—individual, state and systemic levels. At the individual level, emphasis is placed on how human nature predisposed individual actors to opt for war. At the state level, the absence of a democratic culture, long-standing ethnic, religious and social differences, and conflicting economic policies impelled both governments toward conflict. Both Meles Zenawi and Issayas Afeworki were successful guerilla leaders who inherited dilapidated infrastructures on assuming leadership in their respective countries and did not make any deliberate effort to improve them. Although they adopted diametrically opposite systems of government, with Ethiopia embracing an ethnic based, federal structure and Eritrea pursuing a unitary system, they are/were both autocratic and continue to suppress domestic challenges and manipulate the populace for their own self interests. The two states used warfare as an instrument of state and nation building. Economically, each state adopted a divergent model of economic development. Eritrea pursued a free market export oriented economy while Ethiopia adopted an agricultural based closed economy. These different models came to "haunt" them when they created different exchange rates for the same currency leading to further economic tensions.

At the international level, the major powers, the United States and the USSR, contributed to the war. The U.S played an insignificant role in restraining the former allies from resorting to war although it took a mediator's role once hostilities erupted. The details of conflict resolution will be covered in the next chapter.

# IV.   CONFLICT RESOLUTION ATTEMPTS

## A.   INTRODUCTION

> If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty is this: You must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place, oblige it to control itself.[170]

Barely a week after the first border clashes between Ethiopia and Eritrea at Badme on May 6, 1998, both regional and international actors offered to mediate the dispute. The United States' rapid diplomatic response team led by Susan Rice, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, worked closely with Paul Kagame, then vice president of Rwanda,[171] and established a four-point peace formula on June 3, 1998 to enhance a peaceful and durable resolution of the war. This peace proposal was accepted by Ethiopia, but not by Eritrea.[172] The Organization of African Unity (OAU) then took over stewardship of mediation efforts, further developing the four-point proposals into a Framework Agreement. Again, Ethiopia accepted it while Eritrea refused

A breakthrough came on June 18, 2000 in Algeria, when both parties signed an agreement committing themselves into the immediate cessation of hostilities. The parties requested UN assistance with the implementation of ceasefire, which resulted in the establishment of the UNMEE by the Security Council in July 2000. Further negotiations between Ethiopia and Eritrea continued in Algiers resulting in a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed on December 12, 2000.

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[170] James Madison, Federalist No.51, February 6, 1788. Cited in Michael W. Doyle and Nicholas Sambani. *Making War and Building Peace* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), 197.

[171] John Prendergast, "U.S. Leadership in Resolving African Conflict: The Case of Ethiopia-Eritrea," *United States Institute of Peace* (September 7, 2001).

[172] Negash and Trovoll, 57, and CNN, 'Ethiopia accepts Peace Plan with Eritrea,' at: http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/africa/9806/04/ethiopia.update.pm/ (accessed August 11, 2010).

Ten years after the historic signing of the Algiers Agreement, the conflict remains unresolved. This chapter will analyze why the efforts of multiple actors to advance implementation have failed, resulting in continuing deadlock.

## B.    THE U.S-RWANDA PEACE PLAN

The U.S-Rwanda team was the first to broker the conflict with a view to ending hostilities and obtaining a lasting peaceful settlement. Having established points of convergence between parties, the team recommended:

- The need for both parties to commit themselves to settling this conflict and any other via peaceful means while renouncing the use of force to impose solutions.

- The need for reduction of hostilities, deployment of observers at Badme to safeguard territorial claims of either party, redeployment of Eritrean forces from Badme to areas held prior to May 6, 1998, and a return to normalcy in Badme.

- The need for both parties to agree on a final, binding delimitation and demarcation of the common border on basis of existing colonial treaties and applicable international law using qualified personnel.

- The need for the demilitarization of the border by both parties.[173]

A day after the plan was made public, Meles Zenawi, in a public address, accepted the peace proposals in total as the cornerstone the peaceful resolution of the crisis.[174] Eritrea, on the other hand, skeptical of Ethiopia's commitment to peaceful settlement, declined to endorse them, maintaining that the facilitators ought to have come up with a more comprehensive plan with sufficient details and an implementation framework. Eritrea further stated that, "while the facilitation process has gone a long way

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[173] U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, Press Statement by James P. Rubin (June 3, 1998).

[174] Address by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, June 4, 1998.

in creating grounds for a non-violent and legal solution, the Government of Ethiopia, which has stated its acceptance of the recommendations, is still bent on an all-out war."[175] Indeed, Eritrea's reluctance to endorse was justified by a reckless official statement issued by Meles on June 4, 1998:

> Although the Ethiopian Government maintains its stand for peace and supports the compromise proposal presented by the government of the United States and Rwanda even now, the continued aggression of the Eritrean Government has exhausted our patience. Therefore, the Defence Forces of Ethiopia have been directed to take all necessary measures against the repeated aggression of the Eritrean Government and to safeguard the territorial integrity of the country….[176]

The following day, on June 5, 1998, the Ethiopian air force bombed Asmara airport. Eritrea retaliated the same afternoon by bombing a school (sadly, full of students) at Mekelle. Because the United States had earlier issued a warning, all embassies in Asmara had evacuated their personnel the previous day, which caused the Eritreans to claim that Washington had prior knowledge of Ethiopia's plans. This brought to sharp focus, suspicion of Washington's interests in the dispute and created distrust in the whole peace plan. Both Asmara and Addis Ababa saw the fact that the U.S. delegation was led by "a relatively young and inexperienced woman" as evidence of their conflicts' lack of importance in the eyes of Washington.[177]

Further, the framing of the four point plan seemed to suggest one party was to blame for the conflict. Because the United States' demand that Eritrean troops leave Badme (*status quo ante bellum*) matched that of Ethiopia, Eritrea suspected collusion and ceased to see Washington as an "honest broker." Conversely, Eritrea was opposed to abandoning Badme, arguing that cessation of hostilities was sufficient to facilitate delimitation and demarcation of the border. It is this disagreement that stymied the U.S.-Rwanda four-point peace proposals (FPPP) and other follow-on peace initiatives.

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[175] The Government of Eritrea, June 5, 1998.

[176] Official Statement, Meles Zenawi, June 4, 1998. Also see Negash and Trovoll, 59.

[177] Negash and Trovoll, 'Ethiopia accepts Peace Plan with Eritrea,' 59–60.

## C. THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY'S EFFORT

The Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict was the main agenda of the OAU summit held from June 1-10, 1998 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. A High-Level Delegation (HLD) consisting of heads of states from Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Zimbabwe and Rwanda, and the OAU chairman, was established to facilitate negotiations between the parties. When the HLD visited the parties on June 18–19, 1998, Ethiopia confirmed acceptance of the FPPP, but Eritrea maintained that the FPPP was a closed chapter and would treat the OAU plan as a new initiative. This initial visit by the HLD was thus a total failure, but an Ambassador Committee (AC) was immediately appointed to take over the duties of HLD.

The mandate of the AC was to investigate and gather intelligence about the conflict including the disputed areas. After site visits, the AC submitted a comprehensive report to the HLD on August 1–2, 1998. This report formed the basis on which the OAU conflict resolution framework was developed.[178] The key point of convergence between the parties was the modalities for the settlement of the disputed border on basis of delimitation and demarcation. Nonetheless, this report did not have any significant deviation from FPPP as it endorsed the need for the return of *status quo ante bellum*.

During the HLD meeting of November 7–8, 1998, Meles accepted the OAU framework for a peaceful resolution of the dispute when he received a clarification regarding the withdrawal of Eritrean forces as well as administration of Badme. For his part, Issayas insisted on a formal ceasefire agreement so that all parties were "committed to the cardinal rule of rejecting use of force in resolving disputes." In Asmara on December 12, 1998, in a meeting with OAU Secretary General Salim Ahmed Salim, Afeworki presented a statement indicating Eritrea's hesitation, stressing *inter alia* that, "Indeed, while Eritrea had made it clear that the [U.S.-Rwanda] facilitation process was over and it regarded OAU initiative as a new one, the recommendations by the Committee of Ambassadors revolved around the same parameters that had led to the

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[178] Negash and Trovoll, 'Ethiopia accepts Peace Plan with Eritrea,' 61.

failure of the facilitation process."[179] President Afeworki also presented a list of thirty-one issues that needed clarification by the OAU before Eritrea could endorse the OAU's proposals.

During the OAU meeting held on December 17, 1998, Meles Zenawi accused Eritrea of derailing the peace process and demanded a return of status quo ante bellum. Meles also recounted before the members the infamous border clashes Eritrea had had with all its neighbors. Afeworki retaliated in a speech to the Central Organ of the OAU dismissing Ethiopia's accusations as hollow and that "Ethiopia's shrill and offensive language is designed to drown the facts in the sea of accusations."[180] President Afeworki also expressed his appreciation of the OAU's commitment to resolving the conflict, but elaborated his main areas of disagreement with the OAU's proposals, most critical being withdrawal of troops and a return of civil administration at Badme. He suggested that the demarcation of the border would automatically resolve the issue of Badme.[181] The Central Organ of the OAU noted the sentiments of both parties but unconditionally endorsed these proposals as the appropriate framework for resolution of the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict." The parties were further implored to "cooperate with the HLD with a view to creating the necessary conditions for the speedy implementation of the Framework Agreement."[182]

In short, the negotiations had come to a standstill by the close of 1998, and both parties began preparing for full-scale war. In January 1999, the OAU responded to Eritrea's request for clarification, but its response was not acted upon because both parties were engaged in mutual recriminations.

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[179] A letter handed over to the Secretary General during the Meeting with President of Eritrea in Asmara, 12 December 1998.

[180] Speech by President Issayas Afeworki to the OAU Central Organ meeting, Ouagadougou, December 17, 1998.

[181] Negash and Trovoll, 65-66.

[182] The OAU Statement on the Dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea, Ouagadougou, 17–18 December 1998.

## D.    THE UN EFFORT

The UN involvement began when it adopted the OAU Framework Agreement through Security Council resolution 1226 of January 29, 1999. The UN expressed strong support for the OAU initiative reaffirming it as the "best hope for peace between the parties."[183] This resolution also endorsed the appointment of a UN special envoy to the Horn to bolster the OAU peace initiative. Noted also was the fact that Eritrea had received clarifications from the OAU and was "strongly urged to accept the Framework Agreement as basis for peaceful resolution of the dispute…without delay."[184] Paragraph 7 of the resolution implored both parties to remain committed to the peace process while abstaining from use of military force against each other.

Eritrea responded the same day in a letter to the President of the Security Council affirming that, "Eritrea is fully engaged in the peace process because it understands and realizes fully well that the framework is not a 'take it or leave it' offer."[185] Eritrea's concern was the procedural details of the negotiation and it emphasized its reluctance to endorse the original Framework Agreement. Conversely, Ethiopia accepted the UNSC resolution, stressing that "it left no ambiguity with regard to what is expected from whom."[186] Ethiopia's sustained air assault prompted the UNSC to issue another resolution, 1227, condemning the use of force and demanding an immediate ceasefire.[187] An arms embargo was placed against both parties.

Each country reacted immediately to the resolution, blaming the other for the breach of the air moratorium. Eritrea exclaimed that the arms embargo would lead to regional imbalance.[188] On the other hand, Ethiopia blamed Eritrea for initiating the bombardment of Ethiopia's northern town of Adirat on February 5 and stated that it was

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[183] S/RES/1226; adopted by the Security Council on 29 Jan 1999, paragraph 1.

[184] S/RES/1226; paragraph 5.

[185] Eritrea UN Mission Letter to the UN Security Council, 29 January 1999.

[186] Press release by the FDRE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2 February 1999.

[187] S/RES/1227. adopted by the Security Council on 10 February 1999.

[188] Statement of the Government of Eritrea on Security Council Resolution 1227, 11 February 1999.

legally entitled to self-defense.[189]  This weapons embargo became the turning point of Ethiopia's relations with the international community over dispute settlement.[190] Indeed, the UN had rekindled [Ethiopia's] bitter memories of an earlier arms embargo issued by the League of Nations in 1936 on both Italy and Ethiopia with full knowledge that Italy, the aggressor, was sufficiently equipped, while Ethiopia (the victim) lacked the arms to defend its territory.[191] Ethiopia felt betrayed by the international community for being judged as the aggressor and that it (the United Nations) could therefore not be trusted to negotiate for a neutral outcome. The Ethiopian parliament strongly condemned the UNSCR for imposing the provocative embargo.[192] Ethiopia also criticized the United States over the violation of the air moratorium,[193] effectively bringing to a halt a parallel U.S. facilitation initiative that had all along been working with the OAU, but had kept a low profile to allow the OAU to come up with a "home grown" solution.

On the Eritrean side, a similar cycle of distrust with the OAU had set in. Historically, President Issayas had openly denounced the OAU as being corrupt and inefficient, and not of any value to the member states. The presence of Djibouti in the HLD also lowered the credibility of the team since Eritrea had had border clashes with Djibouti in 1996. Djibouti had terminated its diplomatic ties with Eritrea following accusations (Eritrea accused Djibouti) of aiding Ethiopia in its war preparation by allowing transit of war supplies through its port.[194]

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[189] 'Eritrea Bombs Adigrat,' Press release from the Office of the Government Spokesperson, FDRE, 5 February 1999.

[190] Following the resumption of air strikes, President Bill Clinton had issued a statement condemning the breach of the air moratorium and had urged Ethiopia in particular to halt the use of air power. See Statement by the United States President, 10 February 1999.

[191] Statement by Ambassador Duri Mohammed before adoption of the Draft Resolution 1227, 10 February 1999 and Getachew  Metaferia, *Ethiopia and the United States: History, Diplomacy, and Analysis* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009), 125.

[192] FDRE, The House of People's Representatives Resolution 01/1999, 'On the War of Aggression by Eritrea against Ethiopia.'

[193] Statement, "A New Twist in Eritrea's Campaign of Lies and Prevarication," issued by the Office of the Government Spokesperson, FDRE, 5 March 1999.

[194] Press release by the Djibouti Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 10 November 1998, and Eritrea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 19 November 1998.

Full scale war erupted following Ethiopia's air attacks on February 5, 1999, and the HLD continued with shuttle diplomacy visiting both capitals attempting to make a breakthrough in the peace process. Ethiopia, through its Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin, reconfirmed its approval of the OAU Framework Agreement and made it abundantly clear to the HLD that the hostilities would only be halted when Eritrea accepted the agreement.[195] Through a sustained three-day offensive code-named "Operation Sunset" carried out on February 23-26, 1999 along the Badme-Shiraro front, the Ethiopian forces managed to recapture Badme village and its environs. The fall of Badme was a big humiliation for Eritrea due to its symbolic value.[196] Indeed, even Issayas Afeworki had once said that, "expecting Eritrea to withdraw (from Badme) is unlikely as the sun never rising again."[197] On February 27, 1999, Asmara announced its endorsement of the OAU Framework Agreement and this gesture was immediately welcomed by the UN Security Council.[198]

During the OAU's summit held on July 11, 1999 in Algeria, the "Modalities for the Implementation" of the Framework Agreement, an invention of the HLD, was endorsed. The "Modalities" committed both parties to peaceful resolution of the conflict and implementation of the Framework Agreement without coercion.[199] When the modalities were presented before the parties, Eritrea accepted but requested full compensation for the deportees and damaged property.[200] Ethiopia on the other hand, did not confirm acceptance, but emphasized the ambiguity of Eritrea's acceptance which had created a new dimension of modalities. As aptly stated by Meles, "We cannot accept that

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[195] Statement by H.E. Seyoum Mesfin, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the FDRE while receiving OAU HLD on 19 February 1999 and Statement by the FDRE, Office of the Government Spokesperson, 21 February 1999.

[196] The significance of Badme is based on the fact that whoever had the legitimate title to it could claim that they were defending their territorial integrity when the war erupted.

[197] Negash and Trovoll, 74.

[198] Statement by the President of the Security Council (S/PRST/1999/9), 27 February 1999.

[199] 'Modalities for the Implementation of the OAU Framework Agreement on the Settlement of the Dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea,' presented 12 July 1999.

[200] 'Eritrea Formally accepts OAU Peace Formula,' press release, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Asmara, 15 July 1999.

modality by emasculating it, gutting the substance out of it, bringing in totally new substance and then say we accept it. That is not acceptable. That is rejection. We will not engage in such a subterfuge. If we accept the package, your Excellencies, we will not tell you so. No ifs, no buts."[201] Sustained negotiation and shuttle diplomacy with Addis Ababa led to Ethiopia's acceptance of the Modalities Agreement on July 20, 1999. Both parties were praised by the international community for this new development.[202]

## E.    SPECIAL ENVOY DIPLOMACY

A joint team comprised of representatives drawn from Algeria, the OAU, the U.S.[203] and the UN met in Algiers[204] and formulated the technical details for the implementation of both the Framework Agreement and the Modalities of Ceasefire Agreement between warring parties. These technical details provided the roadmap through which the Agreements could be implemented without any alterations and were final and binding to the two parties. On scrutinizing the documents, Eritrea accepted the plan while Ethiopia expressed reservations. The U.S team, led by Tony Lake, in collaboration with Ahmed Ouyahia, the Algerian special representative, and Rino Serri, the European Union (EU) special envoy spent the next nine months of shuttle diplomacy visiting Asmara, Addis Ababa and Algiers in order to bring Ethiopia "on board."[205] In April 2000, the joint team met the parties in Algiers where Eritrea presented a list of new conditions for deliberation and the negotiations stalled.

Another round of intensive mediation immediately began in Algiers in May 2000, when Ethiopia mounted a major military offensive which overwhelmed several Eritrean defense positions along the border. On June 18, 2000, the mediators led by Ouyahia and

[201] Statement made by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi at the OAU summit in Algiers, 14 July 1999.

[202] BBC World News, "Optimism over Horn Negotiations," 26 July 1999, at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1269044.stm (accessed August 12, 2010).

[203] The U.S. team was led by Tony Lake, the former national security adviser of Clinton administration appointed in late 1998 to take over from Susan Rice. On the other hand, the African team was headed by Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the Algerian president, who had taken over as chairman of OAU during a last summit of the century held in Algiers on 11 July 1999. See Negash and Trovoll, 77.

[204] Reuters, "Experts Meet on Ceasefire between Ethiopia-Eritrea," 29 July 1999 and AP News Service, "Talks on Peace Plan Open in Algeria," 31 July 1999.

[205] Prendergast, "U.S. Leadership in Resolving African Conflict: The Case of Ethiopia-Eritrea," 4.

Lake, finally emerged with an agreement acceptable to both parties [Algiers Agreement 1 (AA1)] and fighting ceased.[206] This Agreement also allowed the deployment of peacekeepers to facilitate the implementation of the Agreement. Following a request to the UN, the UNSC authorized the establishment of the UNMEE on July 31, 2000.[207] In August 2000, the Security Council of the UN approved the deployment of UNMEE.[208] The next round of talks led by Tony Lake started in the fall of 2000 concentrated on establishing a comprehensive peace agreement that addressed the border delimitation and demarcation, compensation for war damages, and investigations of the origins of the conflict. After month three of intensive sessions and shuttling between Asmara, Addis and Algiers, the Peace Agreement [Algiers Agreement 2 (AA2)] was finally signed by President Issayas Afeworki and Prime Minister Meles Zenawi on December 12, 2000.[209] This Agreement addressed the immediate causes of war—by creating a border delimitation and demarcation commission; reasons for conflict—establishment of claims commission; and proximate effects of the war—establishment of compensation commission.

## F.    PEACEKEEPING

The UNMEE was constituted under Chapter VI of the UN Charter as an observer mission to monitor the cessation of hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the 25 kilometer TSZ separating the parties as indicated in Figure 2. The UNSC authorized the deployment of 4,200 military personnel including 220 military observers. In accordance with AA1, the UNMEE was mandated to monitor the cessation of hostilities and the temporary security zone, chair the military coordination commission (MCC) of the two parties, coordinate and provide technical assistance for humanitarian de-mining activities

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[206] Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities Between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Government of the State of Eritrea, at: http://untreaty.un.org/unts/144078_158780/17/8/8238.pdf. (accessed August 11, 2010).

[207]  S/RES/1312, adopted by the Security Council on 31 July 2000.

[208] S/RES/1320, adopted by the Security Council on August 2000.

[209] The Algiers Peace Agreement between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Government of the State of Eritrea, Algiers, 12 December 2000, at http://unmee.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=57 (accessed August 12, 2010).

in the TSZ and areas adjacent to it, and coordinate the Mission's activities with humanitarian and human rights activities of the UN and other organizations within the theater.[210] In paragraph 13, the resolution emphasized that "the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities links the termination of the UN peacekeeping mission with the completion of delimitation and demarcation of the Ethiopia-Eritrea border…." By early 2001, the UNMEE had already launched its operation on the ground. More than 40 countries participated, with Jordan, India and Kenya contributing the highest number of troops. The major contributors had infantry battalions stationed in sectors west, center, and east respectively.

The UNMEE's mandate was renewed every six months, "taking into account whether the parties had made significant progress in the delimitation and demarcation process."[211] In August 2002, the UN Security Council reconfigured (through resolution 1430) UNMEE's mandate to assist the EEBC in their work, including de-mining in key areas to help the demarcation process, and offering administrative and logistical support to field offices of the boundary commission.[212]  By May 2006, following changes in security and political environment in the Mission area, the UN Security Council decreased the military component to 2300 troops, with a mandate renewal every four months.[213]

Since deployment in 2001, the UNMEE remained an effective buffer separating the two parties which had concentrated their troops along the common border. De-mining teams drawn from Slovenia, Bangladesh, and Kenya de-mined areas adjacent to the border freeing thousands of acres from both mines and unexploded ordinance (UXO). Despite its effectiveness in separating the two countries, the UNMEE faced critical challenges in its operational environment that proved detrimental to its existence. For

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[210] S/RES/1320 adopted by the Security Council on August 2000.

[211] S/2001/202 Report of the Secretary-General on Ethiopia and Eritrea, 7 March 2001, at: http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N01/275/36/PDF/N0127536.pdf?OpenElement (accessed 20 August 2010), S/RES/1344, S/RES/1369, and S/RES/1398.

[212] S/RES/1430 adopted by the Security Council on 14 August 2002. The adjustments were made in accordance with the Secretary-General's recommendations in his report S/2002/744 of 10 July 2002.

[213] S/RES/1681, adopted 31 May 2006.

example, in September 2006, Eritrea cut fuel supplies to fifty percent of the Missions' requirements. This constraint forced the UNMEE to limit its operations and relocate some elements to Ethiopia.[214] By December 2007, the UNMEE's operations were completely deactivated when Eritrea completely severed fuel supplies to the peacekeepers. Not only did this further limit the Mission's access to already restricted areas, it also undermined the safety and security of UN personnel, as all equipment – from evacuation vehicles to clinics, storage and communication systems – depended on diesel generators. Despite the Secretary General's warning that "if the fuel supplies were not resumed immediately, the Mission would be forced to halt its operations and relocate from Eritrea," Eritrea continued with fuel restrictions.[215]

With the border standing virtually demarcated as of January 2008, Eritrea announced that it would not accommodate UNMEE forces in its territory any longer. In January 2008, President Issaias Afeworki informed the Security Council through a letter that since the border was virtually demarcated, the UNMEE's continued existence inside the Eritrean territory amounted to occupation.[216] The UNMEE was dealt a blow when Eritrea also cut off food supplies to UN forces in February 2008. Consequently, the UN was forced to pull its UNMEE forces from Eritrea and relocate them in Ethiopia while the Security Council debated modalities of operating from the Ethiopian side. Although Ethiopia accommodated the UNMEE and remained cordial to the UN, it also stated that if it were to host a new mission, its mandate should be decoupled from the EEBC—a demand which undermined a durable peace process and the UN peace efforts.[217] On July 30, 2008, the Security Council adopted resolution 1827, which terminated the UNMEE with effect from July 31.

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214 S/2008/226, paragraph 33 and Reuters, "U.N. Ethiopia/Eritrea Force May Have to Pull Back," at: http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/site/c.glKWLeMTIsG/b.2713925/ (accessed September 5, 2010).

215 S/2008/145, paragraph 5.

216 Reuters, "U.N. Ethiopia/Eritrea Force May Have to Pull Back," at: http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/site/c.glKWLeMTIsG/b.2713925/ (accessed September 5, 2010).

217 Lie, 21.

Although Meles Zenawi has repeatedly stated that he is not going back into war with Eritrea,[218] another round of clashes is imminent as both countries mobilized troops close to the border once UNMEE departed. Both countries continue to hold the largest armies in sub-Saharan African. The World Bank and the International Institute of Strategic Studies 2008 estimates indicate 320,000 and 138,000 troops for Eritrea and Ethiopia respectively.[219] According to a proclamation that followed Eritrea's independence in 1991, all Eritreans aged 18 to 40 years must undertake a 12 to 18 month compulsory military service.

## G.    THE BOUNDARY COMMISSION

A neutral border commission referred to as the Ethiopia Eritrea Boundary Commission (EEBC), was established through Article 4 of the Algiers Agreement anchored on the notion that the demarcation of the border would permanently solve the crisis. The EEBC that consisted of eminent legal experts selected by the two parties was mandated "to delimit and demarcate the colonial treaty border based on pertinent colonial treaties (1900, 1902 and 1908) and applicable international law."[220] The mandate explicitly forbids the commission from making decisions *ex aequo et bono*.[221] The two countries were in agreement that the findings of the EEBC would be final and binding, and would be followed by expeditious demarcation of the border. Thus, the commission was in essence given a dual mandate; both to delimit and demarcate the 1,000 kilometer boundary (See disputed areas in Figure 6).

The EEBC was officially constituted on February 20, 2001, when the president of the commission was appointed.[222] In March 2001, the commission and the parties held

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[218] Aljazeera, 2007, at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_L_ubKuBGM (accessed August 21, 2010).

[219] Jack Kimbali, "In Eritrea, Youth Say Frustrated by Long Service," at: http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL1412475520080718 (accessed June 5, 2010).

[220] The Algiers Peace Agreement, signed 12 December 2000.

[221] The term *ex aequo et bono* means making decisions on basis of what is just and fair under the circumstance. This is a precautionary measure to ensure that the arbitrators determine the case solely on the basis of the law and what they deem to be fair and equitable in the issue at hand.

[222] First Report of the EEBC to the UN Secretary General.

their first meeting in the Hague in which an agreeable tentative roadmap of border delimitation was formulated. After nearly a year of intensive work, the commission delivered its decision on April 13, 2002. The dense 125-page delimitation decision was composed of eight chapters, with accompanying maps and tables of grid coordinates. The decision was premised on two main issues: the provisions of colonial treaties and whether either party had established a credible administrative claim overriding the provisions of the treaties.[223]

Besides the provisions of the Algiers Agreement, the commission also made reference to the OAU principle of respecting colonial borders that existed at independence.[224] In this case, the commission interpreted this principle as referring to the border that existed when Eritrea became independent on April 27, 1993. Any developments following that date were not considered relevant, unless they could be seen as continuance or confirmation of a line of conduct already clearly established or take the form of express agreement between the two countries.[225]

### 1.    Commission's Ruling and Consequences

The western sector of the border which covers Badme is the most contested portion of the boundary. The delimitation decision of this sector was covered by the interpretation of the 1902 treaty. In the legal interpretation of the treaty, the commission considered the motive of the parties behind the signing of the treaty. An important clause in the treaty of 1902 was the parties' agreement for the border to be delimited in such a manner that the "Cunama tribe could belong to Eritrea." This was understood as a clear indication of the purpose the parties had in mind while signing the treaty. The commission was convinced that this reference to the Cunama tribe was to all parts of the Cunama territory.[226]    Based on this consideration, the commission's final decision invalidated Ethiopian claims and awarded Eritrea all the land of the Cunama tribe which

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[223] EEBC Report paragraph 3.16.

[224] Resolution of AHG/Res16 (1) adopted by the OAU summit in Cairo in 1964.

[225] EEBC, 3.36.

[226] EEBC, 5.34.

included the contentious village of Badme. Further, based on the provision of the treaty and map evidence availed by both parties, the commission interpreted the straight-line section of the border such that it fell to the east of Badme, thus effectively placing the town inside Eritrea. In its decision, the commission concluded that: "These references represent the bulk of the items adduced by Ethiopia in support of its claim to have exercised administrative authority west of the Eritrean claim line. The commission does not find in them evidence of administration of the area sufficiently clear in location, substantial in scope or extensive in time to displace the title of Eritrea that had crystallized as of 1953."[227]
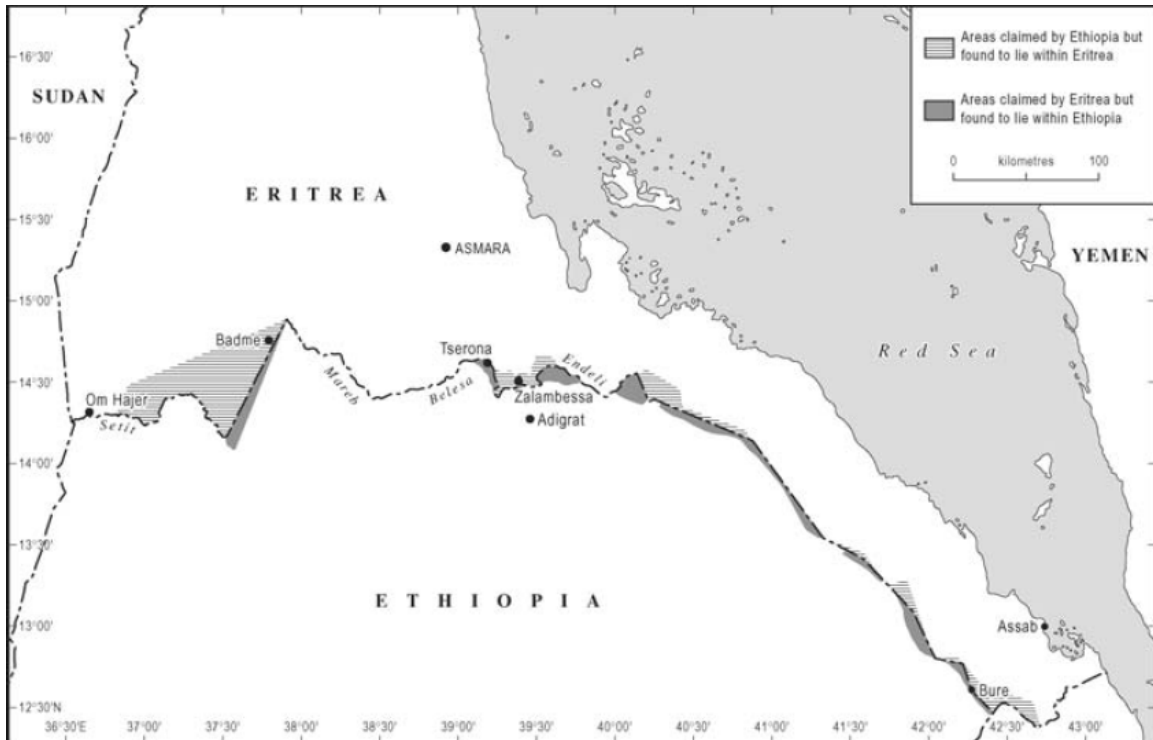


**Figure 5.    Disputed areas in sectors west, center and east.**[228]

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[227]  EEBC, 5.88.

[228] Source: International Boundaries Research Unit, Durham University.

Despite this clear decision, the commission did not show the exact location of Badme on the accompanying maps 2 and 10 as shown in Figure 8 and 9 respectively. The arbiters instead provided coordinates along which the border would lie, creating confusion and speculation. This lack of clarity prompted both parties to celebrate victory. In this regard, Ethiopia's Foreign Minister, Seyoum Mesfin in a press conference said:

> The rule of the law has prevailed over the rule of the jungle. This decision has rejected any attempt by Eritrea to get any reward for its aggression. This decision was fair and legal. Badme and its surroundings which Eritrea invaded and occupied in May 1998 on the basis of false claims, it's (sic) now been decided by the commission that Badme and its surroundings belong to Ethiopia….[229]

Eritrea, on the other hand, criticized Ethiopia's statement while declaring its own victory.[230] Thanks to the confusion, for once all accepted the commission's ruling. The parties were also contented with the commission's findings for sectors center and east. However, when it became apparently clear to Ethiopia that Badme had been awarded to Eritrea, Ethiopia raised strong objection to the commission's decision, but this could not influence any alteration of the decision as it was "'final and binding." The commission instead urged Ethiopia to comply with the decision and cooperate during the demarcation process.[231] Attempts by Ethiopia to renegotiate the commission's decision with Eritrea were unsuccessful as Eritrea clung to the legally correct position.

## 2.     The Stalemate

In December 2003, Lloyd Axworthy, a former Canadian Foreign Minister was appointed by the UN Secretary General as a special representative to help revamp the peace efforts. Unfortunately, Eritrea neither accepted the appointment of Axworthy nor allowed him to visit Eritrea. Eritrea had interpreted his appointment as a scheme to sneak

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[229] Transcript of Press Conference compiled by UNMEE public information office, Addis Ababa, 13 April 2002 and Press release of the Ethiopian embassy of the United States of America at: http://www.ethiopianembassy.org/pr041502.shtml (accessed 15 August 2010).

[230] Statement on the Determination of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Border Commission. Government of Eritrea, Asmara, 13 April 2002.

[231] Letter to the Secretary General from Chairman of EEBC, 7 October 2003.

in "the alternative strategy" of solving the conflict as earlier requested by Ethiopia. Eritrea's adamancy has helped portray Ethiopia as being committed to the search for a solution to the conflict. However, in November 2004, Ethiopia came up with a five-point peace proposal. Within that five-point peace proposal, Ethiopia declared acceptance of the delimitation decision "in principle" and called for dialogue to the immediate implementation of the delimitation decision in a manner "consistent with the promotion of sustainable peace and brotherly ties between the two peoples" and with a view to future normalization of relations.[232] The new proposal was aimed at improving the distorted public image of the country as defiant of international law.[233] Eritrea severed its communications with both the EEBC and Ethiopia rendering demarcation impossible. In deferring demarcation in 2005, the chairman noted: "The commission must conclude by recalling of the line of the boundary was legally and finally determined by Delimitation Decision of 13 April 2002. Though un-demarcated, this line is binding upon both parties, subject only to minor qualification expressed in the Delimitation Decision, unless they agree otherwise. Conduct inconsistent with this boundary line is unlawful."[234]

### 3.      Breaking the Stalemate

Eritrea, although favored by the EEBC's findings, made demands for the international community to force Ethiopia to comply with its obligation, which, however, did not gain traction. Unlike Ethiopia which had demobilized a large part of its force since 2000, Eritrea had remained on war footing since the outbreak of hostilities in 1998. With 10 percent of its population engaged in war, the country was faced with serious social and economic difficulties that needed urgent attention.[235] In October 2005, Eritrea

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[232] Ethiopia's Five Point Plan.

[233] Speech by the Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to the federal parliament in presenting the Five Point Peace Proposal at:
http://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/news/press%20releases/Prime%20Minister%20Meles%20Speech%20to%20House%20of%20Peoples%20Representatives%20on%20Border%20Initiative%2025.11.2005.htm
(assessed 15 August 2010).

[234] Ethiopia-Eritrea Border Commission. Sixth Report on the work of the Commission. Appendix 1 of UNSG Progress Report S/2005/142 of 7 March 2005.

[235] Prendergast, 5.

turned on the UNMEE and systematically started frustrating its operations through the restrictions on road movement, banning of helicopter flights, and restricting access to fuel and rations.[236] The UNSC responded by passing resolution 1640 that threatened to impose economic sanctions on Eritrea unless it rescinded its restrictions on the UNMEE. The same resolution demanded Ethiopia to cooperate in order for demarcation to proceed without further delay.[237] However, no party has complied with this resolution and subsequent diplomatic initiatives have remained largely unsuccessful as Eritrea has declined to attend meetings.

### 4.    Virtual Demarcation

In August and November 2006, the commission tried to enter into dialogue with both parties but they declined. On November 20, guided by the provisions of the Algiers Agreement which demanded expeditious delimitation and demarcation of the contentious border, the commission notified the parties of its decision to mark the border using an alternative modern approach other than the actual ground demarcation. This method entailed the used of "image processing and terrain modeling" (virtual) in the emplacement of boundary pillars on the ground. The line joining the pillars would be the final demarcation in accordance with the 2002 Delimitation Decision.[238] In adopting this approach, the commission used the precedent set in the virtual demarcation of the Iraq-Kuwait border in 1993.[239]  The commission made available to the parties a list of pillars (coordinates) and 45 maps illustrating the emplacements. It also gave both parties a grace period of one year expiring November 2007 to agree on actual ground emplacement of the pillars or to enable the commission to resume its operations. Accordingly, if the parties had failed to comply, the border would automatically stand as demarcated and commission's mandate would be fully executed.

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[236] Prendergast, 5.

[237] S/RES/1640, adopted by the Security Council on 5 November 2005.

[238] Prendergast, 7.

[239]  Iraq-Kuwait border was demarcated in1993 using geographical coordinates of latitude and longitude that had been proposed by the Secretary General to the UN Security Council. Such demarcation was considered final and binding.
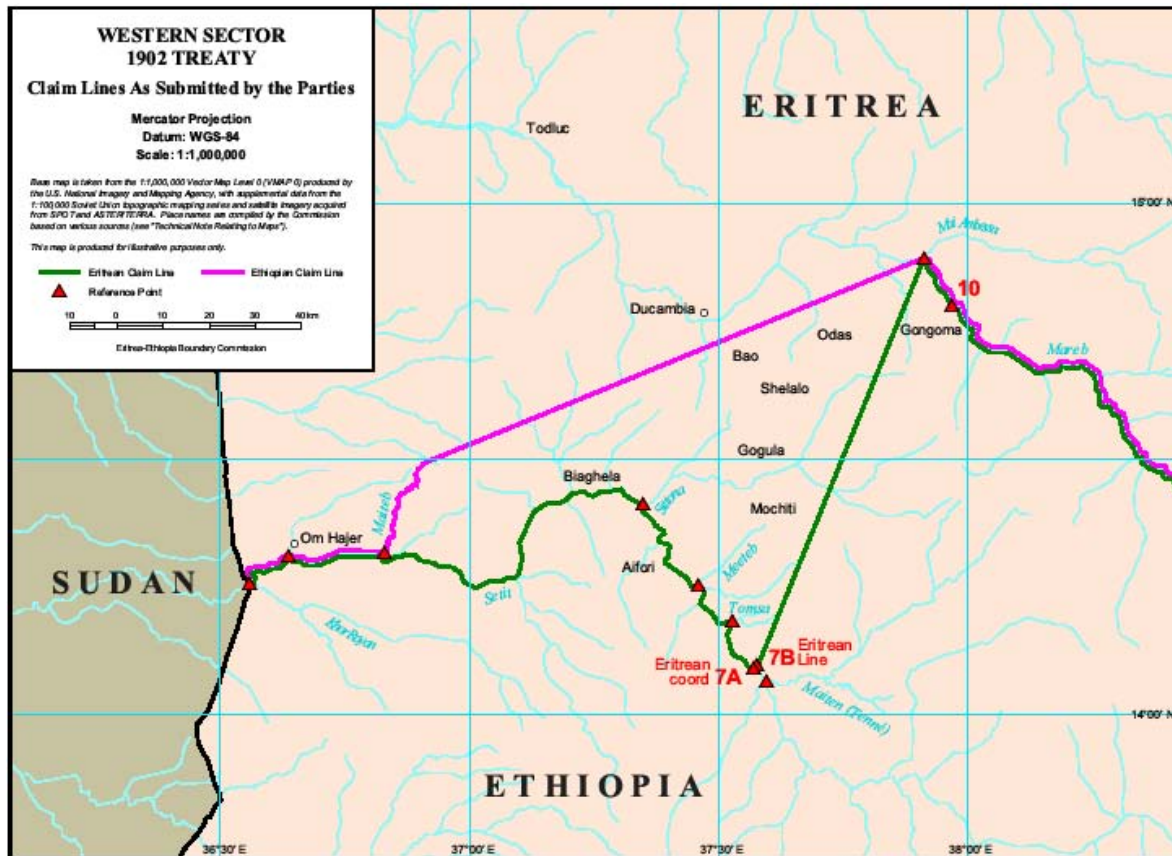
**Figure 6.    EEBC Map 2**[240]

240 From Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission Decision at :
http://www.un.org/NewLinks/eebcarbitration/EEBC-Decision.pdf (accessed  June 5, 2010).
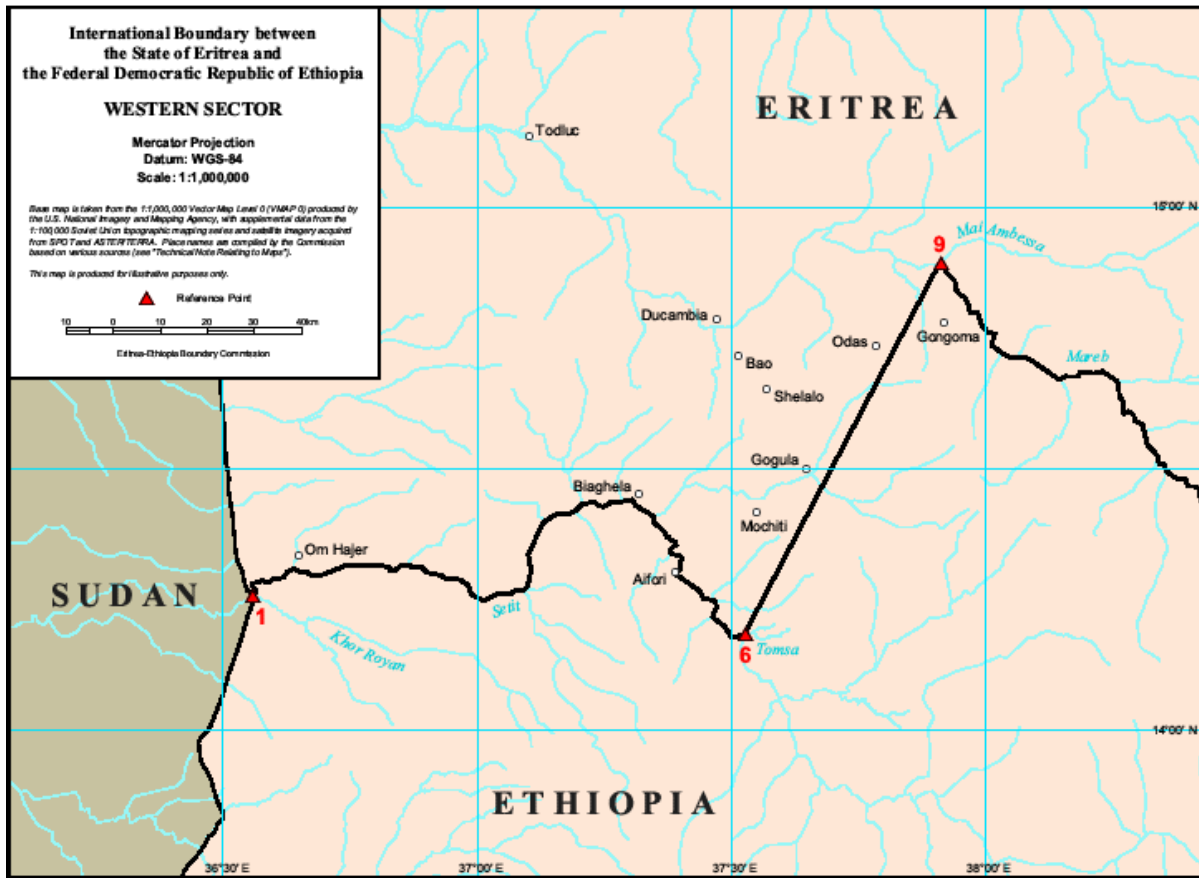
**Figure 7.    EEBC Map 10**[241]

## H.    THE CLAIMS COMMISSION

The Claims Commission, chaired by Professor Hans van Hootte,[242] was mandated under the Algiers Peace Agreement of 2000 which stipulated that the Commission would "decide through binding arbitration" all claims for loss, damage or injury (raised by one party against the other) resulting from war.[243]

The Commission assembled in March 2001 and started deliberations with the parties. The Commission partitioned claims with respect to areas [sectors], and sequentially heard the specific claims prior to issuing a report on collateral damage. The

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[241] From Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission Decision at :
http://www.un.org/NewLinks/eebcarbitration/EEBC-Decision.pdf (accessed  June 5, 2010).

[242] Professor Hans van Hootte had previously worked in the Balkans in a similar assignment.

[243] Article 5 of the Algiers peace agreement.

first claims to be presented related to the execution of military operations, the handling of prisoners of war and civilians, as well as effect of the conflict on civilians and their property.[244] Owing to the controversial nature of the issues under investigation, the hearing was done in camera, effectively locking out much publicity. In the east and central sectors, the Commission found that both parties had committed various atrocities that violated the UN charter. For instance, in the Zalambeza area within the central sector, Eritrea was found to have beaten and killed civilians. Eritrean soldiers also raped women in the Irobo area. Ethiopian soldiers, on the other hand, were found guilty of destruction of property and raping of women in Tserona and Senafe. Surprisingly, the port of Assab in the eastern sector was not under any dispute.

In the western sector, Ethiopia filed a claim demanding compensation by Eritrea for launching planned and unprovoked attacks in violation of the UN Charter and international law.[245] Eritrea responded by first challenging the authority of the Commission to adjudicate  the case invoking Article 3 of the Algiers Agreement which required the establishment of an independent commission to investigate the origins of the conflict. Eritrea argued that the Commission had no mandate to decide on Ethiopia's claims. In defending itself, Eritrea argued that Ethiopia had been illegally occupying its territory, and had launched the attack on May 6 and 7, 1998, killing eight Eritrean soldiers. In addition, Eritrea argued that it acted in self defense over its sovereignty and that the military activities had been within its territory.

In its ruling, the Commission found Eritrea culpable of launching the incursion against Ethiopia. The Commission also asserted that Eritrea had used disproportionate force[246] in response to a localized border skirmish, which did not amount to an armed attack as specified in the UN charter. In response to Ethiopia's claim of premeditated

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[244] Ruling of the claims are available at the Permanent Court of Arbitration website: http://www.pca-cpa.org/ENGLISH/RPC/.

[245] Partial Award *Jus Ad bellum*, Ethiopia's Claims 1-8. Ethiopia-Eritrea Claims Commission, December 2005.

[246] According to Prendergast, Eritrea reacted to Ethiopia's initial attack using at least two infantry brigades, supported by tanks and artillery. See Prendergast, 8.

incursions, the Commission rejected it for lack of evidence. Implicitly, arising from this ruling, Eritrea would only pay the costs of the initial attack and not the cost for the entire duration of the conflict.

As noted earlier, the EEBC had awarded Badme to Eritrea. The Claims Commission on its part found Eritrea as the aggressor that triggered the border conflict by attacking Ethiopia in Badme, which was being administered by Ethiopia. The findings by the two Commissions, in effect, contradict each other.

## I.      WHY HAS PEACE REMAINED ELUSIVE?

Despite heavy political and monetary investment by the international community for over ten years, considerable ground remains to be covered in order to obtain a durable solution to this conflict. With the border virtually demarcated, one is tempted to ask: Why has peace remained elusive? This section will endeavor to explain why and where actors involved and the peace process have failed.

### 1.      Weaknesses of the UNMEE

As seen above, the UNMEE was established under chapter VI of the UN charter as an observer to monitor cessation of hostilities in the AA1 June 18, 2000. The AA2 of December 12, 2000; established the EEBC to tackle the border issue. As such, the UNMEE concentrated on monitoring the TSZ and verifying compliance of the agreement and was detached from the core of the conflict—the border issue. Furthermore, even if there was any breach of the agreement, the UNMEE did not have the capacity to enforce. The UNMEE's existence came to be tied with the completion of border demarcation through resolution 1430, yet it lacked a clear framework or mandate of enforcing decisions of the EEBC. According to a research fellow of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Jon Lie, lack of political mandate or access to political players prevented the UNMEE from participating in political and mediatory forums that could have contributed to mission success.[247] The UN was indecisive in reviewing the mandate of the UNMEE especially when it became apparent that the parties were withdrawing

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[247] Lie, "UNMEE:Deterioration and Termination," 29.

consent (through imposition of restrictions) in order to undermine the peace process. Through restrictions imposed by Eritrea, the UNMEE became a hostage and therefore unable to fulfill its mandate.

## 2. Weaknesses of EEBC

### a. *Dual Mandate*

In the AA2, the EEBC was given the dual mandate of delimitation and demarcation of the border. This had an advantage of harnessing the expertise obtained during the delimitation process to hasten the demarcation process. Nonetheless, this dual responsibility may have incentivized the party not favored by the delimitation decision to use the demarcation process to pressure the commission to adjust the delimitation decision. The case of the EEBC clearly illustrated this potential danger. Ethiopia launched a complaint against the delimitation decision as required by the demarcation process.[248] According to Malcolm Shaw, the EEBC in effect demonstrated that combining the two mandates was troublesome and the best option would have been to phase the two processes and allow each to be executed by an independent body.[249]

### b. *Insufficient Transparency*

Although the EEBC delimitation was clear—putting Badme on the Eritrean side—the commission failed to indicate the exact location of Badme in the accompanying maps and thereby created speculation and confusion in the parties. This prompted both sides to claim victory from which it became extremely difficult to back down. The fact that oral hearings and written pleadings of the parties during the delimitation phase were done in private may also have been counterproductive. However, Martin Pratt argues that although it is common practice for the proceedings of border

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[248] Eleventh Report.

[249] Shaw Malcolm, "Title, Control, and Closure? The Experience of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission." *International and Comparative Law Quarterly,* Vol 56 (2007), 794.

arbitrations to remain confidential and for corresponding awards to be public, it is by no means obligatory. Public debates encourage informed assessments of positions and help dispel rumors.[250]

### c.      Unrealistic Timeframe

In the Algiers Agreement of 2000, both parties committed themselves to prepare and submit claims within forty-five days from the day of endorsement, and the Commission was asked to submit a decision within six months from its first meeting. However, the commission took slightly over sixteen months to publish its decision which was extraordinary short period especially when compared to records set by similar commissions.

It can be argued that Ethiopia's criticism of the EEBC of not taking adequate account of Ethiopia's longstanding administration of the controversial Badme is a reflection of time constraint. Pratt notes that although Ethiopia's claim for Badme was rejected for insufficient evidence, perhaps Ethiopia would have made a strong case if it had been given more time.[251] The tight time framework pressurized the EEBC to continue with the delimitation of the border in the central sector even in the absence of suitable maps and aerial photographs. The delimitation was to be adjusted during the demarcation stage. These inconsistencies have served to undermine Ethiopia's confidence in the EEBC.

### d.      Inadequate Geographical Expertise

The EEBC was composed of a five-member team with vast experience in third party boundary adjudication, either as arbiters or advocates.[252] Although the UN Cartographic Unit provided technical support to the EEBC as required by the AA2, the inclusion of a geographer as a permanent member of the team would have provided better

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[250] Martin Pratt, "A Terminal Crisis? Examining the Breakdown of Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Dispute Resolution Process," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 23 (2006), 338.

[251] Ibid. 336.

[252] The members of EEBC were: Sir Elihu Lauterpacht (President), Prince Bola Adesumbo Ajibola, Professor W. Michael Reisman, Judge Stephen M. Schwebel and Sir Arthur Watts.

interpretation of complex geographical aspects of delimitation including the three old border treaties. According to Pratt, the UN Cartographers lacked sufficient practical skills in border demarcation (UN had only been involved in two border cases; the Kuwait-Iraq border in 1991–1993 and the Israel-Lebanon Withdrawal Line in 2000) and therefore provided limited support. The Commission also faced logistic constraints that made field visits impossible.[253]

### 3. Failure of Diplomacy

#### a. *The Protagonists*

Both Eritrea and Ethiopia have been involved in liberation struggles and have developed strong political cultures in which compromise is equated with capitulation. Past mistrust and antagonism exacerbate the relationship between the two parties. With such cultures, chances for success of any outside diplomatic efforts are reduced.

Since the end of the war in 2000, the leadership in both countries has faced serious criticism from their close inner circles, making them feel less secure and less confident of their position.[254] Besides, according to Sally and Plaut, each party views the other as being on the verge of collapse and hence in no position to back down. This lowers their incentives to cooperate in the search for a lasting solution.[255]

Although the status quo hurts the economies of both states, it favors Ethiopia in maintaining Badme, albeit at increased cost for maritime access. For Eritrea, on the other hand, political gains surpass border issues as the state retains overwhelming control over its citizens.   The country remains in a permanent state of emergency with press freedoms curtailed, political parties banned and youths forcibly conscripted into

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[253]  Pratt, "A Terminal Crisis? Examining the Breakdown of Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Dispute Resolution Process," 337.

[254] Healy Sally and Martin Plaut, "Ethiopia and Eritrea: Allergic to Persuasion," *The Royal Institute of International Affairs* Vol. 7, No. 1. (2007), 8.

[255] Ibid.

military service. Eritrea's failure to realize one of its independence proclamations—a high level of economic development—frustrates the leadership and hence results in reluctance in resolving the dispute.

### b.    Unbalanced Contest

Despite Meles Zenawi's rejection of the virtual border demarcation, dismissing it as "a legal nonsense,"[256] Ethiopia has exploited its diplomatic brilliance to mask its "legally weak position." Eritrea's diplomatic ineptness has allowed it to gradually lose the favorable decision of Badme. Eritrea exists in almost complete international isolation, thanks to its closure of any border discourse.[257]

The unbalanced diplomatic contest arises from Ethiopia's status—ties with the U.S. in the Global War on Terror; the only country in Africa never colonized; size and population; and that it hosts the African Union. Eritrea has been uncooperative with both the UN and the West. As Sally and Plaut aptly note, "Eritrea today is almost hermetically sealed from the outside world." The international community has therefore been reluctant to compel its "amenable ally" (Ethiopia) to accept the verdict of the EEBC.

### c.    Inept Agreement

The Algiers Agreement was premised on the idea that border delimitation would permanently solve the dispute. In reality, the causes of the conflict were many and complex. The border disagreement was just one of the causes. According to Sally and Plaut, the mediation process cannot be blamed for focusing only on the border as neither of the protagonists was opposed to treating it as the core issue.[258] The emphasis on delimitation diminished chances for maneuvers as the process could only produce a winner and a loser.  The mediation was hasty and simplistic, with both parties entering

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[256] Aljazeera, 2007. At: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_L_ubKuBGM (accessed August 21, 2010).

[257]  Eritrea unsubscribed from IGAD in 2007. It does not also send representatives to AU summits when the venue is Addis Ababa. Also see note 84.

[258] Sally and Plaut, "Ethiopia and Eritrea: Allergic to Persuasion," 2.

into "final and binding" accord without understanding its full implications. Perhaps focusing on the consequences of the war rather than the causes would have created room for cooperation.

The Agreement created the EEBC and the Claim Commission which gave contradictory outcomes in their findings. The EEBC awarded Badme village to Eritrea, which ratified Eritrea's claim that it had been attacked within its territory and that it did not advance beyond the border. On the other hand, the Claim Commission found Eritrea guilty for launching an attack against Ethiopia in May 1998. These contradictory decisions, in part, hardened the belligerents' positions thereby impeding possibilities of obtaining a final resolution.

## J.    CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented not only a case of failure of a state to establish a peaceful inter-state relationship (Ethiopia and Eritrea), but also a stand-alone example of the failure of both regional and international diplomacy, in which the OAU (now AU) displayed its ineptness in coping with conflict prevention and resolution in Africa. The role of the UN in this conflict is reminiscent of how differently the international community responds to conflicts and crises in Africa as compared with similar occurrences elsewhere.

The conflict resolution approach adopted was narrow, focusing only on border delimitation rather than a comprehensive approach that would have offered greater space for maneuvering. The Algiers Agreement, though approved by both parties and witnessed by the international community, lacked the framework of enforcing the "final and binding" decision that arose from commissions set up under the agreement. The next chapter will address what needs to be done to overcome the stalemate.

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# V.    TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE PEACE

## A.    INTRODUCTION

The protracted border impasse, the potential for resurgence of border clashes, the possibility of violent political dynamics resulting from totalitarianism in both Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the ways these challenges affect the entire horn of Africa and beyond, call for new and more nuanced comprehensive and coordinated initiatives. Deliberate conflict transformation policies, sustained high-level diplomatic engagements, willingness to take risks and accept costs, and grassroots reconciliation strategies offer the best hope for peace.

## B.    SETTLING THE CONFLICT

Given the delicate nature of Ethiopia-Eritrean conflict and its linkage with other regional conflicts in Somalia, Sudan and the Nile Basin, there are two options that can be explored to bring lasting peace—political compromise and political federation.

### 1.    Political Compromise

In order to end the border stalemate, the United States and other international actors must pressure Ethiopia to accept unambiguously the delimitation decision of the boundary commission. Ethiopia's withdrawal from Badme will help ease tensions that might otherwise degenerate into a major conflict, pave way for physical demarcation,[259] and initiate comprehensive negotiations between parties. If Ethiopia declines, then Washington and other guarantors to the Algiers Agreement should categorically condemn the breaching of the peace agreement and punish Ethiopia by imposing economic and political sanctions.

Although sanctions may bring peace, they might not lead to normalization of relationships. Once Ethiopia complies, further negotiations aimed at restoring mutually

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[259] The EEBC had indicated willingness to reconvene and proceed with the demarcation if the situation is permissive.

beneficial economic bonds, compensation for communities affected by the demarcation, and building trust between communities living along the border should be pursued.

On the other hand, the UN, the United States of America and other diplomatic players should engage Eritrea with a view of refining the demarcation details to allow for a political compromise on Badme. Given the symbolic significance of Badme to the two countries, it could be placed under the sovereignty of a 'joint dominion framework' administered by both Ethiopia and Eritrea or under the sovereignty of one state with special rights granted to citizens of the other state.[260] Once this is achieved, subsequent negotiations should address other avenues for cooperation that could be exploited to the benefit of the two countries. For example, Eritrea could develop its agricultural potential in the western arid areas using water from Tekeze River in exchange of allowing Ethiopia maritime access. The United States and European Union could support and finance the strategically placed Ethiopia to exploit its natural resources—gas reserves and water—so that it can export these energy resources to its neighbors including Eritrea. Exploitation and transportation of resources would require development of necessary infrastructure and security cooperation framework so that mutual benefits can be maximized. At present, the exchange of electricity from Ethiopia for Sudanese oil has eased relations between these two countries. Similar developments have been taking place in the Caucasus, where energy transportation and infrastructure networking has improved the relations between Georgia and Armenia on one hand and Georgia and Azerbaijan on the other.[261] Transformation of the Ethiopia-Eritrea dispute into an energy-led cooperation and integration offer the best hope for sustainable peace in the region.

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[260] In May 1999, a similar regime was used to resolve a border conflict between Peru and Ecuador, in which Peru was granted private property rights to Ecuador in a $1km^2$ area around Tiwinzi—the site of heavy fighting between the two countries in 1995—symbolic of the sacrifices made by the two armies during the conflict.

[261] Hughes Butt Kent and Arthur L. Bradshaw Jr. (ed), "Caspian Sea: International Environmental Security Game," *Centre for Strategic Leadership, United States* (1998), 13, at: http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA515654&Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf (accessed August 29, 2010).

## 2.    Political Federation

Conditions have greatly changed in the Horn of Africa since Emperor Haile Selasie abrogated the Eritrean-Ethiopian federation in 1962, thereby triggering Eritrea's liberation struggle.  The current political situation in the region appears favorable to regional or sub-regional integration and the introduction or development of federal structures. Leading by example is the East African Community (EAC) established by a treaty signed between Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania on November 30, 1999. These three countries established a customs union in 2005 and a common market in July 2010, and have since been joined by their neighbors Rwanda and Burundi. Modalities for common monetary union and currency are in progress—expected to be operationalized by 2012 and 2015, respectively—climaxing with a political federation of East African States.[262]

In the case of Eritrea and Ethiopia, there are special factors that make it necessary for them to strengthen their cooperation and integration. Integration will be easy because they share a common history, culture, and languages, and have also lived together under one political system. The constitution of 1952 may serve as the basis for the new federal dispensation. The reunification of Eritrea and Ethiopia will restore unity of the communities—Afars, Tigreans, Sahos, Bilens and the Cunama—that live on both sides of the border.  This reunion will diffuse the political differences and suspicions that have for nearly two decades hampered mutually beneficial cooperation. However, federation would only be possible when both societies are sufficiently democratized to a level conducive for genuine pluralism and federalism, where law is institutional than personal, where the masses are no longer objects of manipulation and deceit, but active participants in building their future, and where legitimacy and stability occur as a result of transparency and accountability. The civil society, Churches, intellectuals, Diasporas, youth and women should play a pivotal role in leading a new culture of dialogue and peace. Establishment of Ethiopia-Eritrea Peace Forum will be a step in the right direction.

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262  New York Times, "East African Countries Form a Common Market," at: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/02/business/global/02africa.html (accessed September 1, 2010).

Federation will demand total reform of entire milieu, resulting to equality between the entities, which, in the case of Ethiopia and Eritrea, never existed. Ethiopia's ethnic federal system must be overhauled because it is difficult to manage, especially as urbanization has mixed the regions and promotes ethnic tensions. Nor should secession remain a legal option. The Republic of South Africa offers an example of the benefits–and the challenges–of depoliticizing ethnicity.

One need only put together two statements to make concrete the argument that recasting a political union is not a farfetched proposal. During Eritrea's Independence Day in 1993 Afeworki stated that, "I will not rule out establishing a confederation with Ethiopia,"[263] words echoed by his Ambassador to Ethiopia who stated, "Forming an independent state was never the ultimate goal of our long struggle. Integration will be easier with Ethiopia as we share common history, culture, and languages, and have also lived together under a common political system."[264] The restoration of Ethiopia-Eritrea federation could serve as the focal point for economic cooperation and the integration of the Horn. A strategic exchange — Ethiopian hydro power for Eritrean Sea ports could revamp and transform their economies for the benefit of each country.

It should also be noted that smaller nations face problems in an increasingly consolidating global economy if they fail to pool their social and physical capital.[265] Eritrea's lack of sufficient natural resources coupled by its small size, make it an insignificant market for major manufacturers or distributors. World Food Programme Director for Eritrea Jean-Pierre Cebron recently observed that, even if Eritrea invested significant resources in its agricultural sector to double food production, it could only meet 40 percent of the country's needs.[266] Therefore, the consolidation of the two countries makes economic, as well as political, sense.

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[263] African Confidential, 30 April 1993.

[264] The Reporter, Addis Ababa, Vol. 1, No. 2, 18 September 1996.

[265] European Union brought together its historic enemies Germany and France forming a strong economic bloc.

[266] Martin Doornbos and Alemeseged Tesfai (eds), *Post Conflict Eritrea: Prospects for Reconstruction and Development* (Asmara: The Red Sea Press, 1998), 114.

## C. CONCLUSION

Political compromise stands as the fastest means to bringing peace and stability in both Eritrea and Ethiopia. Unfortunately, due to domestic pressures and hardened stance taken by the leadership of both sides, concessions and trade-offs are unlikely in the immediate future. Badme has become a powerful symbol of a refusal to compromise in both countries and its significance as a stumbling block to progress will linger until cooler heads prevail to resolve the impasse. Integrating what was once already integrated may seem easy to outsiders, especially if this time federation of the two states took place in a more equitable manner than before. Federation would allow setting up a new political order that is able to create conducive environment for sustainable peace and development.

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# VI.   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## A.    CONCLUSION

This study highlights the fact that the Ethiopia-Eritrea border is one more potential flashpoint in an already volatile Horn of Africa. The interstate war fought between the two countries in 1998-2000, although ostensibly over an obscure border outpost, in fact has deeper historical roots. According to Heldet, "a territorial dispute is virtually necessary but not a sufficient condition for interstate war."[267] The main underlying causes were political and economic. This thesis has argued that the cause of this war was due to political manipulation by the leadership of the two countries to serve their own political interests. After ascending to power, both TPLF and EPLF failed to address basic needs and aspirations of their people, and instead manipulated ethnic tensions and historical animosities in order to maintain total control.

Despite heavy political and monetary investment by both regional and international actors, the border conflict remains unresolved. The mediators established the Algiers Agreement as a permanent framework for resolving the dispute through border delimitation, which was agreed upon by both parties as final and binding. Unfortunately, this agreement when coupled by EEBCs limitation on making decisions *ex aequo et bono,* merely produced a sense of winners and losers and short-circuited any prospects for dialogue. The Algiers Agreement lacked the enforcement mechanism and, because of the vagueness of Article 94 of the UN Charter and the Security Council's reluctance to get involved in territorial disputes, Ethiopia's violation of the agreement remains unchallenged. Indeed, the case of Ethiopia and Eritrea has confirmed the argument that any border dispute resolutions that perpetuate colonial era boundaries face serious challenges of legitimacy. Colonial borders were drawn with a practical disregard of the impact they would have on the local population. Therefore, any meaningful border

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[267] See note 106.

resolution initiative aimed at achieving sustainable peace should be broad-based and include the views of the local communities living along the border.

As the international community labored to resolve the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict, various lessons emerged. First, territorial disputes are very delicate and therefore delimitation of a sovereign territory should not be rushed even if it appears that establishment of a clearly demarcated border will mitigate hostilities between the belligerent parties. The time frame issued to the commission was unrealistic and may have been influenced by the desire to minimize costs related to maintenance of the peacekeeping force. This 'rush' forced the commission to make a decision—without adequate maps or even a site visit—that stymied the peace process and escalated the costs in the long run. Another important lesson is that third party adjudication can undisputedly be an effective tool for settling border disputes when both parties are ready to accept an imperfect outcome. Nonetheless, this method is a high-risk option because there is no inherent enforcement mechanism when one of the partners subsequently evades responsibility. The third lesson concerns the United Nations. The UN should only deploy personnel when there is a correct mandate in place. Mismatched mandates and indecisiveness of the Security Council both contribute to endangering the lives of UN personnel and the failure of the mission.

## B.    RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is strong need for the international community to be just as committed in encouraging compliance with decisions of international judicial bodies as they are in mediating for the creation of such agreements.
- Arbitration agreements must be clear, precise, and contain stringent enforcement mechanism to ensure compliance and avoid protracted disputes.
- Due to the sentimental significance of Badme to the two countries, it should be placed under the sovereignty of a 'joint dominion framework'

administered by both Ethiopia and Eritrea or under the sovereignty of one state with special rights granted to citizens of the other state, or be placed under administration of a neutral body like the United Nations.

- The Ethiopian and Eritrean Diasporas should be incentivized to actively engage in discourse in order to conquer their divisions and to formulate new approaches of overcoming the protracted disputes in their homeland.

- The is need for elites, civil society, churches, women and the opposition parties in both countries to pressure their governments to embrace democracy and a culture of dialogue.

- The international community should as a matter of priority resolve this conflict, as this will ameliorate security in the Horn and open dialogue for resolving the conflict over the Nile River.

- Multi-national donors should help Ethiopia to harness its energy resources so that it can export to its neighbors. This will result to energy-led political cooperation in the Horn.

- Both Ethiopia and Eritrea should be encouraged to work together towards a cooperative framework to leverage their respective advantages to create an interdependence which culminates into a federation.

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